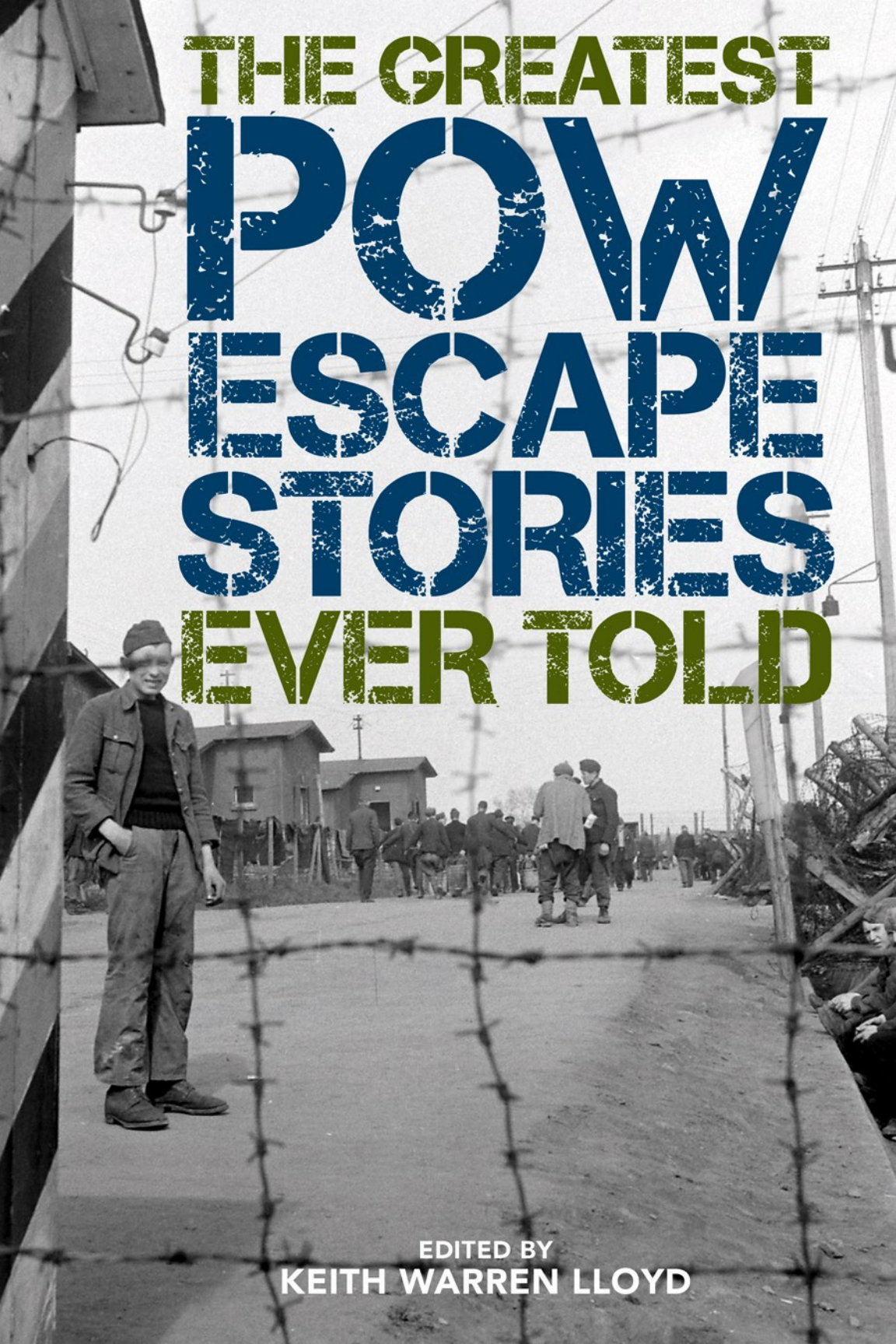
THE GREATEST
POW
ESCAPE
STORIES
EVER TOLD
EDITED BY
KEITH WARREN LLOYD

The Greatest POW Escape Stories Ever Told

The Greatest POW Escape Stories Ever Told

Edited by Keith Warren Lloyd

Guilford, Connecticut

An imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Blvd., Ste. 200
Lanham, MD 20706
www.rowman.com

Distributed by NATIONAL BOOK NETWORK

Copyright © 2020 Keith Warren Lloyd

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote passages in a review.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020945444

ISBN 978-1-4930-4994-3 (paper: alk. paper)
ISBN 978-1-4930-5380-3 (electronic)

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Contents

Introduction vii
The Plight of the Prisoner of War

Chapter 1: London to Ladysmith via Pretoria 1
Winston Spencer Churchill

Chapter 2: They Have Their Exits: Escape from Colditz Castle . . 17
Airey Neave

Chapter 3: Hero Found: Dieter Dengler's Escape from Laos . . . 41
Bruce Henderson

Chapter 4: Prisoner of the U-90 69
Edouard Isaacs

Chapter 5: The Great Desert Escape from Papago Park 91
Keith Warren Lloyd

Chapter 6: The Long Walk 121
Slavomir Rawicz

Chapter 7: Twelve Iron Men: Escape from the Philippines 195
Robert Barr Smith and Laurence J. Yadon

Chapter 8: The Libby Prison Break of the American Civil War . . 209
Isaac N. Johnston

Chapter 9: Tom, Dick and Harry: The Great Escape
from Stalag III 241
Robert Barr Smith and Laurence J. Yadon

Introduction

The Plight of the Prisoner of War

Ferdinand Fuge was a tall, dark-haired, and broad-shouldered youth, a machinist in the German Navy who had been serving aboard the *U-664* in August 1943, when the ill-fated submarine was destroyed by American aircraft in the North Atlantic. Along with forty-three other survivors, Fuge was plucked from the sea by the destroyer USS *Borie* and soon found himself as a prisoner of war at the Papago Park POW camp just outside Phoenix, Arizona.

In May 1944, Fuge and another German sailor slipped out of the camp by hiding beneath the floorboards in the bed of an army truck, only to be arrested by local police in the neighboring town of Tempe three hours later. In December Fuge would flee Papago Park once again, one of twenty-five German POWs to escape through a 178-foot-long tunnel laboriously dug through the rocky desert soil.

On the cold and rainy Christmas Eve that followed, Fuge and his companion Kurt Strehle, hungry, soaked, and chilled to the bone, would knock on the door of a farmhouse in Tempe and give themselves up. After they were returned to Papago Park, the men were brought before the Board of Inquiry that had been convened to investigate the mass escape, an event that was making national headlines and proving to be a great embarrassment for the US Army.

"Why did you escape?" Fuge was asked.

The young German looked at the questioning officer through a pair of deep-set, brooding eyes.

"As long as there will be prisoners of war, there will always be escapes," Fuge replied.

In ancient times, when a soldier found himself defeated on the field of battle and taken prisoner, the best he could hope for was a lifetime of slavery—if he were not immediately set upon and murdered by a merciless foe. The Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans all enslaved their prisoners of war, while captured nobles of wealth and power were often held for an exorbitant ransom. The English word "triumph" comes from the Latin *triumphus*, the term for the victory parades of the Roman Legions, where prisoners were marched in chains through the streets of Rome before being sold into slavery. Common warriors captured in battle were often forced to fight in Roman arenas as gladiators, their violent deaths serving as entertainment for hundreds of cheering spectators. During the Middle Eastern crusades, prisoners of war were shown little mercy by either side: Both Christians and Muslims who were not slaughtered outright were often enslaved. The Treaty of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years War that ravaged Central Europe from 1618 to 1648, serves as an early example of belligerent nations agreeing to provide for the humane treatment of prisoners of war. The treaty called for the immediate repatriation of all prisoners following the cessation of hostilities and forbid holding them for ransom. During the Napoleonic Wars the concept of parole came into practice, where prisoners of war were released from confinement in exchange for swearing an oath that they would not attempt to escape and resume fighting, thereby relieving the captors from the burden of housing, feeding, and guarding prisoners. The granting of parole to captured officers and formal exchanges of prisoners were common practices during the American Revolution.

In April 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed General Order 100, also known as the Lieber Code, which established a code of conduct for Union Army soldiers during the American Civil War and included regulations pertaining to the ethical treatment of prisoners of war.

"Military necessity does not admit of cruelty—that is, the infliction of suffering for the sake of suffering or for revenge, nor of maiming or wounding except in fight, nor of torture to extort confessions," the code stated.

Using the Lieber Code as a guide, international agreements regarding the humane treatment of prisoners of war (POWs) soon followed, beginning with the Hague Convention of 1907 and the Geneva Convention

of 1929. The Geneva Convention, the first of several such accords still widely recognized today, established rules for evacuating prisoners from combat zones as well as the operation of prisoner of war camps. Signatories of the Geneva Convention committed themselves to provide for the adequate feeding, housing, and medical care of prisoners of war and agreed to the types of labor that POWs should perform.

When properly observed by signatory states, the Geneva Convention greatly improved the daily lot of prisoners of war, with most belligerent nations operating under the assumption that adherence to the convention and the ethical treatment of prisoners of war was the best way to ensure the survival of their own captured soldiers in enemy hands. The Geneva Convention did not, however, eradicate instances of abuse or atrocities. Some nation-states, even while professing their strict obedience to the accords, would go on to carry out despotic war crimes against prisoners such as torture, beatings, starvation, excessive physical labor, and other cruelties.

While the Geneva Convention did address the responsibilities and expected conduct of prisoners of war while confined within POW camps, it did not prohibit them from attempting to escape. In fact, the treaty established rules for the "detaining power" with regard to how prisoners of war should be disciplined if caught while trying to escape.

"Belligerents shall ensure that the competent authorities exercise the greatest leniency in considering the question whether an offence committed by a prisoner of war should be punished by disciplinary or by judicial measures," Article 52 states. "This provision shall be observed in particular in appraising facts in connection with escape or attempted escape."

In cases where parole was granted, many prisoners saw escape as a despicable act. The privilege of parole was extended chiefly to the officer class, which placed a high value on giving one's word or honor. Other prisoners, particularly if they were treated humanely by their captors, were likewise averse to the idea of escape. If they were removed from the hazards of the combat zone and adequately fed and sheltered, many POWs held the view that "their war" was over, and saw no reason to risk their lives any further.

Still others saw escape and a return to the fight as a moral imperative and their sacred duty. Roland Garros, a French aviator and inventor who

developed one of the early mechanisms that allowed a machine gun to be mounted to the cowling of an airplane and fired through the arc of the spinning propeller, was forced down behind enemy lines and taken prisoner in April 1915. Three years later he managed to escape and made his way to Allied lines, where he once again took up arms against the Germans that had invaded his native France. Garros would be shot down and killed in October 1918, just five weeks before the armistice that ended World War I.

Throughout the history of modern warfare, the duty of the POW to escape captivity appears to have been, for the most part, a cultural expectation in the absence of formal orders issued to troops going into combat. In the Second World War the British established MI9, a branch of military intelligence dedicated to training British and Commonwealth troops to evade capture and, if captured, techniques for a successful escape. Pilots in the Royal Air Force, in particular, were encouraged by MI9 to attempt to escape if captured and were supplied with silk maps, compasses, and language guides.

During the Korean War, several American service members captured by the Communist Chinese and North Koreans were subjected to torture and forced to sign statements condemning the actions of the United States and United Nations forces. To avoid such occurrences during future conflicts, in 1955 President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed Executive Order 10631, the Code of Conduct for members of the Armed Forces of the United States. Article IV describes how captured American troops are expected to behave: "When questioned, should I become a prisoner of war, I am required to give name, rank, service number, and date of birth. I will evade answering further questions to the utmost of my ability. I will make no oral or written statements disloyal to my country and its allies or harmful to their cause." Article III of the Code of Conduct states: "If I am captured I will continue to resist by all means available. I will make every effort to escape and aid others to escape. I will accept neither parole nor special favors from the enemy."

In attempting to escape and return to friendly lines, prisoners of war face a myriad of daunting challenges and deadly hazards. During the Second World War, many German POW camps had a strand of wire

stretched several feet before the perimeter fence, a so-called line of death. Any prisoner crossing the line was liable to be shot. Likewise, American soldiers guarding German prisoners were instructed to shout the word "halt" three times (the word has the same meaning in both languages) when observing a prisoner attempting to escape. If the POW failed to comply, the soldier was instructed to open fire.

If a POW is being held by an enemy that is in retreat or otherwise in disarray, if the facility in which he is confined is makeshift or improvised, if the troops guarding him are substandard (as is often the case), and if sympathetic civilians or partisans can be found among the local population, his chances of a successful escape are much improved. On the other hand, if he is captured by an organized and determined enemy and held in a well-designed camp surrounded by a hostile population, holds no command of the language, and faces immense physical barriers on his route to freedom such as deserts, oceans, and mountain ranges, his chances of self-repatriation are rather slim.

Some POWs attempt escape simply to cause chaos within enemy lines, knowing full well that they will likely be recaptured. This was one of the motivations behind the Great Escape from Germany's Stalag Luft III in 1944. The British and Commonwealth prisoners that performed the escape had hoped, if nothing else, to divert thousands of German troops from the fighting front. This was indeed one of the few objectives of the escape attempt that was successfully met. In some instances, as in the case of captured troops subjected to the brutality of the Soviets and Japanese during World War II, or the North Vietnamese during the Vietnam War, escape was viewed by prisoners of war as being synonymous with survival.

The pages that follow showcase a dozen of the most famous prisoner of war escapes in the history of modern warfare. Although from story to story the escapees may differ in nationality, ideology, and allegiance, and each has been shaped differently by the era and culture in which he was reared, the reader will find that many common traits are shared: loyalty to country and cause, tenacity, resourcefulness, and an abundant amount of courage.

Chapter One

London to Ladysmith via Pretoria

Winston Spencer Churchill

Pretoria: November 20, 1899

On Tuesday, the 14th, the mounted infantry patrols reported that the Boers in small parties were approaching and Colonel Long made a reconnaissance in force to ascertain what strength lay behind the advance scouts. The movement that we had awaited for ten days impended. Accordingly certain military preparations, which I need not now specify, were made to guard against all contingencies, and at daylight on Wednesday morning another spray of patrols was flung out towards the north and northwest, and the Estcourt armoured train was ordered to reconnoitre towards Chieveley.

We started at half-past five and, observing all the usual precautions, reached Frere Station in about an hour. Here a small patrol of the Natal police reported that there were no enemy within the next few miles, and that all seemed quiet in the neighbourhood. It was the silence before the storm.

All was clear as far as Chieveley, but as the train reached the station I saw about a hundred Boer horsemen cantering southwards about a mile from the railway. Beyond Chieveley a long hill was lined with a row of black spots, showing that our further advance would be disputed. So after all there would be a fight, for we could not pass this point without coming under fire.

The Boers held their fire until the train reached that part of the track nearest to their position. Immediately over the rear truck of the train a huge white ball of smoke sprang into being and tore out into a cone like a comet. Then came the explosions of the near guns and the nearer shell. The iron sides of the truck tanged with a patter of bullets. There was a crash from the front of the train and half a dozen sharp reports. The Boers had opened fire on us at six hundred yards with two large field guns, a Maxim firing small shells in a stream, and from riflemen lying on the ridge. I got down into the cover of the armoured sides of the car without forming any clear thought. Equally involuntarily, it seems that the driver put on full steam, as the enemy had intended. The train leapt forward, ran the gauntlet of the guns, which now filled the air with explosions, swung round the curve of the hill, ran down a steep gradient, and dashed into a huge stone which awaited it on the line at a convenient spot.

To those who were in the rear truck there was only a tremendous shock, a tremendous crash, and a sudden full stop. What happened to the trucks in front of the engine is more interesting. The first was flung into the air and fell bottom upwards on the embankment. The next, an armoured car crowded with the Durban Light Infantry, was carried on twenty yards and thrown over on its side, scattering its occupants in a shower on the ground. The third wedged itself across the track, half on and half off the rails. The rest of the train kept to the metals.

We were not long left in the comparative peace and safety of a railway accident. The Boer guns, swiftly changing their position, re-opened from a distance of 1,300 yards before anyone had got out of the stage of exclamations. The tapping rifle fire spread along the hillside, until it encircled the wreckage on three sides, and a third field gun came into action from some high ground on the opposite side of the line.

I reached the overturned portion of the train uninjured. The Durbans who, though severely shaken, were mostly unhurt, were lying down under such cover as the damaged cars and the gutters of the railway line afforded. It was a very grievous sight to see these citizen soldiers, most of whom were the fathers of families, in such a perilous position. They bore themselves well, though greatly troubled, and their major, whose name I have not learned, directed their fire on the enemy; but since these, lying

behind the crests of the surrounding hills, were almost invisible I did not expect that it would be very effective.

A private soldier who was wounded, in direct disobedience of the positive orders that no surrender was to be made, took it on himself to wave a pocket-handkerchief. The Boers immediately ceased firing, and with equal daring and humanity a dozen horsemen galloped from the hills into the scattered fugitives, scarcely any of whom had seen the white flag, and several of whom were still firing, and called loudly on them to surrender. Most of the soldiers, uncertain what to do, then halted, gave up their arms, and became prisoners of war. Those further away from the horsemen continued to run and were shot or hunted down in twos and threes, and some made good their escape.

On the other side of the railway a horseman galloped up, shouting to me and waving his hand. He was scarcely forty yards off. With a rifle I could have killed him easily. I knew nothing of white flags, and the bullets had made me savage. I reached down for my Mauser pistol. "This one at least," I said, and indeed it was a certainty; but alas! I had left the weapon in the cab of the engine in order to be free to work at the wreckage. What then? There was a wire fence between me and the horseman. Should I continue to fly? The idea of another shot at such a short range decided me. Death stood before me, grim sullen Death without his light-hearted companion, Chance. So I held up my hand and cried "*capivy*." Then I was herded with the other prisoners in a miserable group, and about the same time I noticed that my hand was bleeding, and it began to pour with rain.

Pretoria: November 24, 1899

The position of a prisoner of war is painful and humiliating. A man tries his best to kill another, and finding that he cannot succeed asks his enemy for mercy. The laws of war demand that this should be accorded, but it is impossible not to feel a sense of humbling obligation to the captor from whose hand we take our lives. All military pride, all independence of spirit must be put aside. These may be carried to the grave, but not into captivity. We must prepare ourselves to submit, to obey, to endure.

Our captors conducted us to a rough tent which had been set up in a hollow in one of the hills, and which we concluded was General Joubert's

headquarters. Here we were formed in a line, and soon surrounded by a bearded crowd of Boers cloaked in mackintosh. I explained that I was a Special Correspondent, and asked to see General Joubert. But in the throng it was impossible to tell who were the superiors. My credentials were taken from me by a man who said he was a Field Cornet, and who promised that they should be laid before the General forthwith.

Meanwhile we waited in the rain, and the Boers questioned us. My certificate as a correspondent bore a name better known than liked in the Transvaal. Moreover, some of the private soldiers had been talking. "You are the son of Lord Randolph Churchill?" said a Boer, abruptly. I did not deny the fact. Immediately there was much talking, and all crowded round me, looking and pointing, while I heard my name repeated on every side. "I am a newspaper correspondent," I said, "and you ought not to hold me prisoner." The Boer laughed. "Oh," he said, "we do not catch lords' sons every day." Whereat they all chuckled, and began to explain that I should be allowed to play football at Pretoria.

No sooner had I reached Pretoria than I demanded my release from the Government, on the grounds that I was a Press correspondent and a non-combatant. To this effect I wrote two letters, one to the Secretary of War and one to General Joubert; but, needless to say, I did not indulge in much hope of the result, for I was firmly convinced that the Boer authorities regarded me as a kind of hostage, who would make a pleasing addition to the collection of prisoners they were forming against a change of fortune. I therefore continued to search for a path of escape; and indeed it was just as well that I did so, for I never received any answer to either of my applications while I was a prisoner, although I have since heard that one arrived by a curious coincidence the very day after I had departed.

To Mr. de Souza,
Secretary of War, South African Republic.
States Model Schools Prison: December 10, 1899.

Sir,—I have the honour to inform you that as I do not consider that your Government have any right to detain me as a military prisoner, I have decided to escape from your custody.

I have every confidence in the arrangements I have made with my friends outside, and I do not therefore expect to have another opportunity of seeing you. I therefore take this occasion to observe that I consider your treatment of prisoners is correct and humane, and that I see no grounds for complaint. When I return to the British lines I will make a public statement to this effect. I have also to thank you personally for your civility to me, and to express the hope that we may meet again at Pretoria before very long, and under different circumstances.

Regretting that I am unable to bid you a more ceremonious or a personal farewell, I have the honour to be, Sir, your most obedient servant,

WINSTON CHURCHILL

I arranged that this letter, which I took great pleasure in writing, should be left on my bed, and discovered so soon as my flight was known. The prison at States Model Schools stands in the midst of a quadrangle, and is surrounded on two sides by an iron grille and on two by a corrugated iron fence about ten feet high. These boundaries offered little obstacle to anyone who possessed the activity of youth, but the fact that they were guarded on the inside by sentries, fifty yards apart, armed with rifle and revolver, made them a well-nigh insuperable barrier. No walls are so hard to pierce as living walls. I thought of the penetrating power of gold, and the sentries were sounded. They were incorruptible. So nothing remained but to break out in spite of them. With another officer who may for the present—since he is still a prisoner—remain nameless, I formed a scheme.

After anxious reflection and continual watching, it was discovered that when the sentries near the offices walked about on their beats they were at certain moments unable to see the top of a few yards of the wall. The electric lights in the middle of the quadrangle brilliantly lighted the whole place but cut off the sentries beyond them from looking at the eastern wall, for from behind the lights all seemed darkness by contrast. The first thing was therefore to pass the two sentries near the offices. It was necessary to hit off the exact moment when both their backs should be turned together. After the wall was scaled we should be in the garden

of the villa next door. There our plan came to an end. Everything after this was vague and uncertain. How to get out of the garden, how to pass unnoticed through the streets, how to evade the patrols that surrounded the town, and above all how to cover the two hundred and eighty miles to the Portuguese frontiers, were questions which would arise at a later stage.

We determined to try on the night of the 11th of December, making up our minds quite suddenly in the morning, for these things are best done on the spur of the moment. I passed the afternoon in positive terror. Nothing, since my schooldays, has ever disturbed me so much as this. There is something appalling in the idea of stealing secretly off in the night like a guilty thief. The fear of detection has a pang of its own. Besides, we knew quite well that on occasion, even on excuse, the sentries would fire.

At last it grew dark. At seven o'clock the bell for dinner rang and the officers trooped off. Now was the time. But the sentries gave us no chance. They did not walk about. One of them stood exactly opposite the only practicable part of the wall. We waited for two hours, but the attempt was plainly impossible, and so with a most unsatisfactory feeling of relief to bed.

Tuesday, the 12th! Another day of fear, but fear crystallising more and more into desperation. Anything was better than further suspense. Night came again. Again the dinner bell sounded. Choosing my opportunity I strolled across the quadrangle and secreted myself in one of the offices. Through a chink I watched the sentries. For half an hour they remained stolid and obstructive. Then all of a sudden one turned and walked up to his comrade and they began to talk. Their backs were turned. Now or never. I darted out of my hiding place and ran to the wall, seized the top with my hands and drew myself up. Twice I let myself down again in sickly hesitation, and then with a third resolve scrambled up. The top was flat. Lying on it I had one parting glimpse of the sentries, still talking, still with their backs turned; but, I repeat, fifteen yards away. Then I lowered myself silently down into the adjoining garden and crouched among the shrubs. I was free. The first step had been taken, and it was irrevocable.

It now remained to await the arrival of my comrade. The bushes of the garden gave a good deal of cover, and in the moonlight their shadows lay black on the ground. Twenty yards away was the house, and I had not been five minutes in hiding before I perceived that it was full of people;

the windows revealed brightly lighted rooms, and within I could see figures moving about. This was a fresh complication. We had always thought the house unoccupied. Presently—how long afterwards I do not know, for the ordinary measures of time, hours, minutes, and seconds, are quite meaningless on such occasions—a man came out of the door and walked across the garden in my direction. Scarcely ten yards away he stopped and stood still, looking steadily towards me. I cannot describe the surge of panic which nearly overwhelmed me. I must be discovered. I dared not stir an inch. My heart beat so violently that I felt sick. But amid a tumult of emotion, reason, seated firmly on her throne, whispered, "Trust to the dark background." I remained absolutely motionless. For a long time the man and I remained opposite each other, and every instant I expected him to spring forward. A vague idea crossed my mind that I might silence him. "Hush, I am a detective. We expect that an officer will break out here tonight. I am waiting to catch him." Reason—scornful this time—replied, "Surely a Transvaal detective would speak Dutch. Trust to the shadow." So I trusted, and after a spell another man came out of the house, lighted a cigar, and both he and the other walked off together. No sooner had they turned than a cat pursued by a dog rushed into the bushes and collided with me. The startled animal uttered a "miaul" of alarm and darted back again, making a horrible rustling. Both men stopped at once. But it was only the cat, as they doubtless observed, and they passed out of the garden gate into the town.

I looked at my watch. An hour had passed since I climbed the wall. Where was my comrade? Suddenly I heard a voice from within the quadrangle say, quite loud, "All up." I crawled back to the wall. Two officers were walking up and down the other side jabbering Latin words, laughing and talking all manner of nonsense—amid which I caught my name. I risked a cough. One of the officers immediately began to chatter alone. The other said slowly and clearly, ". . . cannot get out. The sentry suspects. It's all up. Can you get back again?" But now all my fears fell from me at once. To go back was impossible. I could not hope to climb the wall unnoticed. Fate pointed onwards. Besides, I said to myself, "Of course, I shall be recaptured, but I will at least have a run for my money." I said to the officers, "I shall go on alone."

Now I was in the right mood for these undertakings—that is to say that, thinking failure almost certain, no odds against success affected me. All risks were less than the certainty. I said to myself, *toujours de l'audace*, put my hat on my head, strode into the middle of the garden, walked past the windows of the house without any attempt at concealment, and so went through the gate and turned to the left. I passed the sentry at less than five yards. Most of them knew me by sight. Whether he looked at me or not I do not know, for I never turned my head. But after walking a hundred yards and hearing no challenge, I knew that the second obstacle had been surmounted. I was at large in Pretoria.

I walked on leisurely through the night humming a tune and choosing the middle of the road. The streets were full of Burghers, but they paid no attention to me. Gradually I reached the suburbs, and on a little bridge I sat down to reflect and consider. I was in the heart of the enemy's country. I knew no one to whom I could apply for succour. Nearly three hundred miles stretched between me and Delagoa Bay. My escape must be known at dawn. Pursuit would be immediate. Yet all exits were barred. The town was picketed, the country was patrolled, the trains were searched, the line was guarded. I had 75 pounds in my pocket and four slabs of chocolate, but the compass and the map which might have guided me, the opium tablets and meat lozenges which should have sustained me, were in my friend's pockets in the States Model Schools. Worst of all, I could not speak a word of Dutch or the native languages, and how was I to get food or direction?

But when hope had departed, fear had gone as well. I formed a plan. I would find the Delagoa Bay Railway. Without map or compass I must follow that in spite of the pickets. I looked at the stars. Orion shone brightly. Scarcely a year ago he had guided me when lost in the desert to the banks of the Nile. He had given me water. Now he should lead to freedom. I could not endure the want of either.

After walking south for half a mile, I struck the railroad. Was it the line to Delagoa Bay or the Pietersburg branch? If it were the former it should run east. But so far as I could see this line ran northwards. Still, it might be only winding its way out among the hills. I resolved to follow it. The night was delicious. A cool breeze fanned my face and a wild feeling of exhilaration took hold of me. At any rate, I was free, if only for an hour.

That was something. The fascination of the adventure grew. Unless the stars in their courses fought for me I could not escape. Where, then, was the need of caution? I marched briskly along the line. Here and there the lights of a picket fire gleamed. Every bridge had its watchers. But I passed them all, making very short detours at the dangerous places, and really taking scarcely any precautions. Perhaps that was the reason I succeeded.

As I walked I extended my plan. I could not march three hundred miles to the frontier. I would board a train in motion and hide under the seats, on the roof, on the couplings—anywhere. What train should I take? The first, of course. After walking for two hours I perceived the signal lights of a station. I left the line, and, circling round it, hid in the ditch by the track about 200 yards beyond it. I argued that the train would stop at the station and that it would not have got up too much speed by the time it reached me. An hour passed. I began to grow impatient. Suddenly I heard the whistle and the approaching rattle. Then the great yellow head lights of the engine flashed into view. The train waited five minutes at the station and started again with much noise and steaming. I crouched by the track. I rehearsed the act in my mind. I must wait until the engine had passed, otherwise I should be seen. Then I must make a dash for the carriages.

The train started slowly, but gathered speed sooner than I had expected. The flaring lights drew swiftly near. The rattle grew into a roar. The dark mass hung for a second above me. The engine-driver silhouetted against his furnace glow, the black profile of the engine, the clouds of steam rushed past. Then I hurled myself on the trucks, clutched at something, missed, clutched again, missed again, grasped some sort of handhold, was swung off my feet—my toes bumping on the line—and with a struggle seated myself on the couplings of the fifth truck from the front of the train. It was a goods train, and the trucks were full of sacks, soft sacks covered with coal dust. I crawled on top and burrowed in among them. In five minutes I was completely buried. The sacks were warm and comfortable. Perhaps the engine-driver had seen me rush up to the train and would give the alarm at the next station; on the other hand, perhaps not. Where was the train going to? Where would it be unloaded? Would it be searched? Was it on the Delagoa Bay line? What should I do in the morning? Ah, never mind that. Sufficient for the day was the luck thereof.

Fresh plans for fresh contingencies. I resolved to sleep, nor can I imagine a more pleasing lullaby than the clatter of the train that carries you at twenty miles an hour away from the enemy's capital.

How long I slept I do not know, but I woke up suddenly with all feelings of exhilaration gone, and only the consciousness of oppressive difficulties heavy on me. I must leave the train before daybreak, so that I could drink at a pool and find some hiding-place while it was still dark. Another night I would board another train. I crawled from my cosy hiding-place among the sacks and sat again on the couplings. The train was running at a fair speed, but I felt it was time to leave it. I took hold of the iron handle at the back of the truck, pulled strongly with my left hand, and sprang. My feet struck the ground in two gigantic strides, and the next instant I was sprawling in the ditch, considerably shaken but unhurt. The train, my faithful ally of the night, hurried on its journey.

It was still dark. I was in the middle of a wide valley, surrounded by low hills, and carpeted with high grass drenched in dew. I searched for water in the nearest gully, and soon found a clear pool. I was very thirsty, but long after I had quenched my thirst I continued to drink, that I might have sufficient for the whole day.

Presently the dawn began to break, and the sky to the east grew yellow and red, slashed across with heavy black clouds. I saw with relief that the railway ran steadily towards the sunrise. I had taken the right line, after all.

Having drunk my fill, I set out for the hills, among which I hoped to find some hiding-place, and as it became broad daylight I entered a small grove of trees which grew on the side of a deep ravine. Here I resolved to wait till dusk. I had one consolation: No one in the world knew where I was—I did not know myself. It was now four o'clock. Fourteen hours lay between me and the night. My impatience to proceed, while I was still strong, doubled their length. At first it was terribly cold, but by degrees the sun gained power, and by ten o'clock the heat was oppressive. My sole companion was a gigantic vulture, who manifested an extravagant interest in my condition, and made hideous and ominous gurglings from time to time. From my lofty position I commanded a view of the whole valley. A little tin-roofed town lay three miles to the westward. Scattered farmsteads, each with a clump of trees, relieved the monotony of

the undulating ground. At the foot of the hill stood a local kraal, and the figures of its inhabitants dotted the patches of cultivation or surrounded the droves of goats and cows which fed on the pasture. The railway ran through the middle of the valley, and I could watch the passage of the various trains. I counted four passing each way, and from this I drew the conclusion that the same number would run by night. I marked a steep gradient up which they climbed very slowly, and determined at nightfall to make another attempt to board one of these. During the day I ate one slab of chocolate, which, with the heat, produced a violent thirst. The pool was hardly half a mile away, but I dared not leave the shelter of the little wood, for I could see the figures of white men riding or walking occasionally across the valley, and once a Boer came and fired two shots at birds close to my hiding-place. But no one discovered me.

The elation and the excitement of the previous night had burnt away, and a chilling reaction followed. I was very hungry, for I had had no dinner before starting, and chocolate, though it sustains, does not satisfy. I had scarcely slept, but yet my heart beat so fiercely and I was so nervous and perplexed about the future that I could not rest. I thought of all the chances that lay against me; I dreaded and detested more than words can express the prospect of being caught and dragged back to Pretoria. I do not mean that I would rather have died than have been retaken, but I have often feared death for much less. I found no comfort in any of the philosophical ideas which some men parade in their hours of ease and strength and safety. They seemed only fair-weather friends. I realised with awful force that no exercise of my own feeble wit and strength could save me from my enemies, and that without the assistance of that High Power which interferes in the eternal sequence of causes and effects more often than we are always prone to admit, I could never succeed. I prayed long and earnestly for help and guidance. My prayer, as it seems to me, was swiftly and wonderfully answered, I cannot now relate the strange circumstances which followed, and which changed my nearly hopeless position into one of superior advantage. But after the war is over I shall hope to lengthen this account, and so remarkable will the addition be that I cannot believe the reader will complain.

The long day reached its close at last. The western clouds flushed into fire; the shadows of the hills stretched out across the valley. A ponderous

Boer waggon, with its long team, crawled slowly along the track towards the town. The locals collected their herds and drew around their kraal. The daylight died, and soon it was quite dark. Then, and not till then, I set forth, I hurried to the railway line, pausing on my way to drink at a stream of sweet, cold water. I waited for some time at the top of the steep gradient in the hope of catching a train. But none came, and I gradually guessed, and I have since found that I guessed right, that the train I had already travelled in was the only one that ran at night. At last I resolved to walk on, and make, at any rate, twenty miles of my journey. I walked for about six hours. How far I travelled I do not know, but I do not think that it was very many miles in the direct line. Every bridge was guarded by armed men; every few miles were gangers' huts; at intervals there were stations with villages clustering round them. All the veldt was bathed in the bright rays of the full moon, and to avoid these dangerous places I had to make wide circuits and often to creep along the ground. Leaving the railroad I fell into bogs and swamps, and brushed through high grass dripping with dew, so that I was drenched to the waist. I had been able to take little exercise during my month's imprisonment, and I was soon tired out with walking, as well as from want of food and sleep. I felt very miserable when I looked around and saw here and there the lights of houses, and thought of the warmth and comfort within them, but knew that they only meant danger to me. After six or seven hours of walking I thought it unwise to go further lest I should exhaust myself, so I lay down in a ditch to sleep. I was nearly at the end of my tether. Nevertheless, by the will of God, I was enabled to sustain myself during the next few days, obtaining food at great risk here and there, resting in concealment by day and walking only at night. On the fifth day I was beyond Middelburg, so far as I could tell, for I dared not inquire nor as yet approach the stations near enough to read the names. In a secure hiding-place I waited for a suitable train, knowing that there is a through service between Middelburg and Lourenco Marques.

Meanwhile there had been excitement in the States Model Schools, temporarily converted into a military prison. Early on Wednesday morning—barely twelve hours after I had escaped—my absence was discovered—I think by Dr. Gunning. The alarm was given. Telegrams with my description at great length were despatched along all the railways. Three

thousand photographs were printed. A warrant was issued for my immediate arrest. Every train was strictly searched. Everyone was on the watch. The rumours in part amused me. It was certain, said the *Standard* and *Diggers News*, that I had escaped disguised as a woman.

The next day I was reported captured at Komati Poort dressed as a Transvaal policeman. Finally it was agreed that I had never left Pretoria. I had—it appeared—changed clothes with a waiter, and was now in hiding at the house of some British sympathiser in the capital. On the strength of this all the houses of suspected persons were searched from top to bottom, and these unfortunate people were, I fear, put to a great deal of inconvenience. A special commission was also appointed to investigate "stringently" (a most hateful adjective in such a connection) the causes "which had rendered it possible for the War Correspondent of the *Morning Post* to escape."

I find it very difficult in the face of the extraordinary efforts which were made to recapture me, to believe that the Transvaal Government seriously contemplated my release before they knew I had escaped them. Yet a telegram was swiftly despatched from Pretoria to all the newspapers, setting forth the terms of a most admirable letter, in which General Joubert explained the grounds which prompted him generously to restore my liberty. I am inclined to think that the Boers hate being beaten even in the smallest things, and always fight on the win, tie, or wrangle principle; but in my case I rejoice I am not beholden to them, and have not thus been disqualified from fighting.

On the sixth day the chance I had patiently waited for came. I found a convenient train duly labelled to Lourenco Marques standing in a siding. I withdrew to a suitable spot for boarding it—for I dared not make the attempt in the station—and, filling a bottle with water to drink on the way, I prepared for the last stage of my journey.

The truck in which I ensconced myself was laden with great sacks of some soft merchandise, and I found among them holes and crevices by means of which I managed to work my way to the inmost recess. The hard floor was littered with gritty coal dust, and made a most uncomfortable bed. The heat was almost stifling. I was resolved, however, that nothing should lure or compel me from my hiding-place until I reached Portuguese

territory. I expected the journey to take thirty-six hours; it dragged out into two and a half days. I hardly dared sleep for fear of snoring.

I dreaded lest the trucks should be searched at Komati Poort, and my anxiety as the train approached this neighbourhood was very great. To prolong it we were shunted onto a siding for eighteen hours either at Komati Poort or the station beyond it. Once indeed they began to search my truck, and I heard the tarpaulin rustle as they pulled at it, but luckily they did not search deep enough, so that, providentially protected, I reached Delagoa Bay at last, and crawled forth from my place of refuge and of punishment, weary, dirty, hungry, but free once more.

Thereafter everything smiled. I found my way to the British Consul, Mr. Ross, who at first mistook me for a sailor off one of the ships in the harbour, but soon welcomed me with enthusiasm. I bought clothes, I washed, I sat down to dinner with a real tablecloth and real glasses; and fortune, determined not to overlook the smallest detail, had arranged that the steamer *Induna* should leave that very night for Durban. As soon as the news of my arrival spread about the town, I received many offers of assistance from the English residents, and lest any of the Boer agents with whom Lourenco Marques is infested should attempt to recapture me in neutral territory, nearly a dozen gentlemen escorted me to the steamer armed with revolvers. It is from the cabin of this little vessel, as she coasts along the sandy shores of Africa, that I write the concluding lines of this letter, and the reader who may persevere through this hurried account will perhaps understand why I write them with a feeling of triumph, and better than triumph, a feeling of pure joy.

Editor's note: After his escape, the former cavalry officer and war correspondent Winston Churchill returned to active duty in the British Army, participating in the campaign to capture Pretoria where he received the surrender of the prison guards that once held him captive. Churchill returned to England a national hero, published his memoir London to Ladysmith via Pretoria *and thrilled lecture audiences in Britain, Canada, and the United States with his account of the daring escape. In 1901 he was elected to the House of Commons and embarked upon a long and distinguished political career, becoming prime minister of the United Kingdom in 1940.*

Chapter Two

They Have Their Exits: Escape from Colditz Castle

Airey Neave

It was a hot evening early in August 1941 when I went onto the parade ground with a British Army overcoat over my sham uniform. Beneath my overcoat I held my false German cap as I stood among the ranks of British prisoners. Around us at their usual posts beside the locked doors of the different quarters stood sentries in the darkening courtyard. There were a dozen or so in number, and as I stood there with my heart beating I wondered half-humorously what they would think of their new comrade.

The counting done, the order to dismiss was given in a loud German fashion, and the prisoners in a surging mass moved to different doorways to return to their quarters. Someone quickly removed my khaki overcoat from my shoulders.

I placed my German cap squarely on my head, stuck out my chest, and marched towards the main door. It was half-open and a German under-officer put his head out. I spoke to him nervously. "I have a message to the Kommandant from Hauptmann Priem." In the arc lights outside the gate his face seemed pale and anxious. He said nothing but stared at me sharply as I turned on my heel and marched away from the guard-house.

I felt again the sense of being free. It was like a drug which brought an intense pleasure, an exquisite unburdening of the soul. When I was close to the first archway, there was a loud shout behind me. The tone of the voice was uncertain. "Halt!" There were more shouts from the guard-house as I turned round towards the lights. It was a fatal mistake. I became aware that the gray scenery paint on my uniform was glowing

under the arc lamps, reflecting in my tunic a shade of pea-green. The painfully designed cap, with all its markings, was the worst. It shone like a brilliant emerald in the glare.

"Halt, or I fire!" cried a voice as I reached the archway.

It was hopeless. I was not prepared to be shot for having failed so dismally. I turned again and threw up my hands. As I did so the sentry came running from the archway and prodded me in the back with his rifle. In a moment all the inmates of the guard-room were upon me, chattering excitedly and pointing rifles and revolvers. The underofficer in charge had a fit of hysterical rage of particularly Teutonic quality. "This is an insult to the German Army! You will be shot."

The tall figure of the Kommandant, Oberst Prawitz, appeared among the crowd which came rapidly to attention. The passion and the threats vanished. Prawitz was dignified and crushing and wore the smartest of uniforms with a decoration hanging from his high collar.

"What impertinence," he said in lofty tones. "Take him away to the cells."

For several weeks after my attempt to escape I remained at the window of the castle sadly watching the approach of autumn. I was still in the British quarters for the number of punishment cells in the castle and the town jail was insufficient to contain the throng of prisoners under sentence.

My sentence meant a whole month away from the twitter of the camp, surrounded by books in a warm cell. When the order came for me to go to the town, I bundled my favourite books with tobacco, cigarettes and chocolate for many weeks in a blanket. I had enough cigarettes for months and lay on my bed smoking and reading save for an hour's exercise in the courtyard. In my cell I was far from war. The mighty events of 1941 disturbed me not at all. Tobruk and Pearl Harbour never interrupted my secluded peace.

When I was taken from the jail and marched back to the castle I saw once more the little gate in the wall of the moat bridge. At night it appeared in my dreams as the gateway to the land beyond the Blue Mountains. As autumn gave way to winter of that monotonous year I

joined in the plans of the British prisoners to produce a variety show in the camp theatre.

The camp theatre was a great room on the second floor of the building adjoining the gates of the inner courtyard. In this building senior officers of the Allied Nations were quartered. Here lived a French general, a Polish admiral, and a Polish general with senior British officers. Was there a passageway leading to the attic on the upper floor of the guard-house? Roaming like inquisitive children around some mysterious mansion in the hours of daylight, we came excitedly upon the secret. There was a passageway. The way to it lay under the floor of the theatre stage.

The prospectors in this new territory were led by Pat Reid and "Hank" Wardle, a Canadian in the Royal Air Force who first discovered the magic entrance. Hank was a very tall man of immense physical strength. With the usual rope of mattress covers tied to one of the supports of the stage, he climbed down into the sealed passage. Facing him was a locked door leading to the gate-bridge. He picked the lock and, walking softly in slippered feet through the musty air, he came to a further door on the far side. It opened without difficulty, revealing steps into an attic above the guard-house.

On the floor beneath was the German Officers' Mess and up the stairs into this gloomy place came hoarse laughter and the tinkle of glasses. Pat Reid proposed that teams of two, one British and one Dutch officer, should attempt to escape disguised as German officers. My friends were not enthusiastic. The failure of other attempts had disheartened them. They did not believe that, even in a German uniform, it would be possible to get past the guard-room, and there were disheartening though friendly comments.

"It will only alert the Goons." "You are being rather selfish." "I can't think why they allow you to go." I learned at Colditz that the escaper must have absolute confidence in his success. He must never be discouraged by the gloom of his companions or he is lost.

What more natural than that two officers, after visiting the mess above, should appear from the guard-room door walking towards the Kommandantur? From the moment that the passage was discovered, I concentrated every thought on how to fool the sentry who was posted

outside the guard-room. If the man were cold and bored with duty on a winter's night, would his numbed brain suspect two officers coming from his own guard-house?

My first and most valuable acquisition was the long, green uniform overcoat of an officer of the Netherlands Home Army. There were in the camp upwards of sixty officers of the Dutch Forces, who, rather than take an oath of allegiance to Hitler, had resolved to spend the war in captivity. All of them were men of high character who spoke good English and German. Most of the officers were of the Netherlands East Indies Army, whose uniform was a shade of jungle green and unsuitable for my purpose. The prewar Home Army, however, had blue-green uniforms, whose colour could easily pass at night for field grey. The Dutch and the British had early come to an agreement upon escape matters. Since the Dutch officers spoke German they were allowed to take part in British schemes and share the store of aids to escape. They also volunteered to hand over pieces of their uniform for the escape from the guard-house.

The final plan agreed on envisaged the escape of two parties of bogus German officers at an interval of twenty-four hours. The first party would consist of Lieutenant Toni Luteyn of the Netherlands East Indies Army and myself. Such was the talent in the camp that I had no difficulty in discovering officers who could convert the Dutch material into a very passable German officer's overcoat. The epaulettes, normally of woven silver braid, were made from thick linoleum cut from the floor of the bathroom, painted silver and sewn to the shoulders.

I had decided to promote myself to the rank of Oberleutnant and to take on the identity of an infantry officer named Schwartz. It was therefore necessary to provide small gold stars to denote that rank. These were fashioned from wood, cut with a penknife and painted gold. Although the Germans, after several discoveries of imitation uniforms, stopped supplies of silver and gold paint to the canteen, a quantity had been saved and carefully stored. The epaulettes were finished with a gold numeral to denote an infantry regiment.

There remained only the collar of the overcoat and the buttons. A dark green collar was cut from green baize material. The buttons were of lead from lavatory piping poured into skilful moulds made by the Dutch. My belt on this occasion was of cardboard painted brown from a box of water colours, and with a fine imitation revolver holster of cardboard filled with newspaper.

My disguise was nearly complete. Towards the beginning of December, I made a remarkable discovery concerning my own service dress uniform cap which had been sent to me by my parents in a parcel. I stripped it of khaki material and discovered to my astonishment that, underneath, it had a bright black shiny peak.

Paddon bent the brim and sides of the cap so that it stood high above the peak, and covered the whole with Dutch uniform material. The principal badge, a design of leaves in silver with a roundel in white and red in the centre, he cut from a piece of linoleum. The familiar eagle's wings and swastika design, also in linoleum, were sewn above. He finished this masterpiece by sewing white piping on the edge of the brim. With such a uniform I could face the arc lights once more with confidence.

On the morning of 5th January, 1942, Luteyn and I were ready to escape. We held a conference and decided to try immediately at nine o'clock that evening. Our compasses, maps, and a small bundle of notes were ready for hiding inside our bodies. The uniforms were now intact beneath the stage and our civilian clothes had so far escaped detection in their "hide." In a moment of supreme confidence, I collected the addresses of relatives of my companions. Then flushed and excited, I lay down to sleep throughout the afternoon and early evening. A few minutes before nine I went down to the courtyard, when the snow was falling lightly.

I had an overpowering sense that this was my last evening in the castle. The certainty grew with every minute, making me composed and determined. There was a sharp order of dismissal and, mingling with the dispersing prisoners, Pat Reid, Hank Wardle, Luteyn, and I hurried quickly into the senior officers' quarters. In the darkness of the theatre, we felt our way beneath the stage, then carefully prised up the loose floorboards.

Cautiously we climbed down, holding the boxes of uniforms, and landed with soft bumps on the floor of the passage. The bright lights from the courtyard shone through the cobwebbed windows in the outer wall of the passage. Treading softly in our socks, we reached the door. Pat Reid, shining his lighter on the lock, swiftly picked it. It opened without a sound for he had oiled the hinges earlier in the week. We were in the half-light of a narrow corridor. We walked quietly across it and stopped at the door that led to the guard-house. The German uniform overcoats were unpacked in silence and we put them over our workmen's clothes, leaving our battledress in the boxes.

As we pulled on our boots there was no sound except the grating of Pat Reid's wire searching in the lock. A minute passed, and suddenly came fear and exasperation. The door would not open. Beneath our feet we could hear the creaking of the gates and the voices of sentries changing guard. We stood motionless, fully dressed as German officers, and waited with pounding hearts.

Pat Reid spoke in a hoarse whisper, "I'm afraid I can't get it open!" He continued turning the wire in the lock. I could hear the wire rasping against the rusty metal as he tried again and again to open it. Ten minutes passed in terrible suspense. I folded my arms and waited. Suddenly there was the noise of old hinges creaking. A quick snap and the door swung open, showing us the dim interior of the attic. "Good luck," said Pat Reid, and shook hands.

We waited till the door was locked behind us and we could no longer hear his muffled steps. Then we crept carefully to the top of stone spiral stairs at an open door on the other side of the attic. A wireless in the guard-room on the ground floor was playing organ music. It was the moment to go down, for the music was loud. We walked quickly down the first flight of stairs, past the door of the officers' mess on the first floor where a light showed beneath. We waited, then stepped confidently down through darkness, into the passage beside the guard-room. The guard-room door was half open, and I caught a glimpse of German uniforms inside, as we marched smartly into the blinding whiteness of the snow under the arc lights.

The testing time had come. I strode through the snow trying to look like a Prussian. There stood the sentry, the fallen snow covering his cap

and shoulders, stamping his feet, just as I had pictured him. He saluted promptly, but he stared at us, and as our backs were turned I felt him watching. We walked on beneath the first archway and passed the second sentry without incident. Then, between the first and second archways, two under-officers talking loudly came from the Kommandantur. They began to march behind us. I felt Luteyn grow tense beside me. I clasped my hands behind my back with an air of unconcern. I might have been casually pacing an English parade ground. In a moment of excitement I had forgotten my part.

"March with your hands at your sides, you bloody fool," came a fierce sharp whisper from my companion. We passed beneath the tower, saluted by the sentry, and came to the fateful wicket-gate. As Luteyn opened it I watched the under-officers, their heads bowed to the driving snow, march on across the moat bridge. Down we went into the moat, stumbling and slipping, until we reached its bed. A soldier came towards us from the married quarters. He reached us, stopped, and stared deliberately.

I hesitated for a moment ready to run, but Luteyn turned on him quickly and in faultless German said crossly, "Why do you not salute?" The soldier gaped. He saluted still looking doubtful and began to walk up the side of the moat towards the gate. We did not look back but hastened up to the path on the far side, and, passing the married quarters, came to the high oak paling which bordered the pathway above the park. We were still within the faint glare of searchlights. Every moment that we stayed on the pathway was dangerous. Lifting ourselves quickly over the paling, we landed in thick snow among the tangle of trees. My cardboard belt was torn and broken and with it into the darkness vanished the holster.

Groping among the trees we struggled through frozen leaves down the steep bank and made for the outer stone wall. It was five minutes before we were at the bottom of the slope. Helped by Luteyn, I found a foothold in the stones of the wall and sat astride the coping. The wall, descending steeply with the tree-covered slope, was shrouded in snow and ice. Each time that I tried to pull Luteyn on top, I lost my foothold and slid backwards through the steep angle of the wall. Then with numbed hands, I caught him beneath the armpits and, after great efforts, hoisted him up beside me. For a minute we sat breathless in the cold air clinging

to the coping, and then jumped a distance of twelve feet. We fell heavily on the hard ground in the woods outside the castle grounds. I was bruised and shaken and frightened. I stood leaning against a tree looking at Luteyn. Another minute passed in the falling snow. "Let's go," I said, and we began to climb towards the east seeking the direction of Leisnig, a small town six miles away.

At ten o'clock the snow was falling less thickly and the moon showed us a way through the trees as we continued to climb towards the road to Leisnig. Beyond the trees we stumbled over frozen fields with hearts uplifted. The headlights of a car, yellow in the bright moonlight, turned in our direction. We lay flat in the snowdrifts till the lights swung towards the east. As we felt the hard surface of the road, I turned up the collar of my dark blue jacket against the cold.

I had left the warm green overcoat behind me buried with the rest of the uniform beneath a pile of leaves and snow. The blue jacket was made from an officer's uniform of the Chasseurs Alpins. Shorn of badges it became a rough workman's coat of serviceable cloth. I was given it by a Jewish officer, Capitaine Boris, who sacrificed his smart uniform for my escape. On my head I wore a ski cap made of blanket and my Royal Air Force trousers were now turned down over my Army boots. From this moment Luteyn and I were Dutch electrical workers with papers permitting us to change our place of occupation from Leipzig to Ulm in southwestern Germany. Leipzig was twenty-two miles from the castle. We planned to reach it by walking the six miles to Leisnig, and there to take an early workman's train. Foreign workers, it was said, were numerous in Leipzig and some were to be transferred to the south. We had no papers for the journey to Leipzig. Success depended on our safe arrival at the main station for the south. Pausing a while beside the road, we recovered money, maps, and papers from the containers concealed in our bodies and then trudged smartly along the road. After two hours we passed a row of cottages close to Leisnig and came to what appeared to be a barracks. A faint light shone from the entrance gate and in the moonlight we saw a sentry. We stopped, turned from the road, and floundered through deep

snow towards a belt of trees on higher ground. We stood there, sheltering among the trees against the sharp winds of the night. The ingenious Dutch officers in Colditz had acquired by bribery a timetable of the trains from Leisnig to Leipzig. We therefore knew that the first workmen's train was due to start at five o'clock. Three hours passed. It was too cold to talk. We waited silently for the train, looking towards the town and listening to the sound of shunting on the railway.

There was not a stir in all that crystal stillness as we climbed down the slope, broke through a hedge, and came back to the road. The road descended into a valley, and walking boldly down the main street to the station we passed an early morning traveller and exchanged greetings. There was peace in the little town with its spires and snow-covered rooftops. We had half an hour to wait. There was no one at the station so we walked away to the outskirts of the town unnoticed.

When the train was due we came slowly back to the entrance of the station where a small group of German working people had collected at the gate. As is the custom, the travellers were not allowed on the platform until the train was due to start. We stood silently aside from the others sheltering from the cold beside a wooden hut. When it was nearly five o'clock the doors opened, and the crowd surged forward to the ticket office. We followed in their wake and Luteyn, who spoke the best German, stopped at the guichet and bought two workmen's tickets to Leipzig. I followed him on to the platform where we stood apart from the others, men and women carrying small baskets or bags of tools.

The orange front light of an engine appeared. It was a scene of true romance. Here were we, escaped enemy prisoners of war, standing on the platform of the little station, mingling with ordinary people travelling to their daily work. The train, puffing with determination through the snow, halted and we climbed into a wooden carriage.

We were herded together in the semi-darkness of air-raid precautions. The warmth inside the carriage covered the windows with moisture so that I could hardly see the dawn. I bowed my head and dozed beside an old and evil-smelling market-woman. Suddenly I was awakened by a sharp kick on my shins and looked up in fear. I met the half-smiling eyes of Luteyn. He sat hunched in a short tight overcoat, his ski cap on one

side. Then I realised that I must have been talking English in my sleep. No one had noticed or even listened to my murmurs. I watched the thin, strained faces of the workingmen as they dozed shoulder to shoulder, and saw the dawn slowly appear through the sweaty windows.

I felt ashamed that Luteyn was more alert and awake. He was strongly-built with humorous grey eyes and long dark hair. He was a strong and buoyant character whose life was spent in laughter and good fellowship. Yet he had a Dutch quality of thoroughness which made him a great escaper. For my part, rebellious by temperament though I was, I found him easy to work with and we seldom argued with each other.

At six o'clock we drew in the great station of Leipzig. The travellers, woken by shrill whistles, began to yawn and swear in low exhausted voices. We looked around us and followed the crowd towards a barrier where we gave up our tickets. There came upon me a sense of alarm and bewilderment. It was twenty months since I had seen the outside world. Here, among the silent crowds of people moving in the dim light of the station, I was aghast at my helplessness. I felt like a peasant come for the first time to a city, unable to comprehend the paraphernalia of civilisation.

We wandered timidly round the station watching the indicators for a train to Ulm and found that no train left until 10:30 in the evening. It slowly dawned on us that we must stay in Leipzig with nowhere to shelter or sleep for many hours. We tried to find refreshment. Entering a tea room we ordered coffee supplied with a small envelope of saccharine. This was all we could obtain, for every other article of food required coupons. The coffee warmed us as we looked shyly at each other, smiling a little and not daring to speak in any language. After paying for coffee, we wandered to a waiting room crowded with travellers, mostly poor, who sat among their luggage and children, silent and obedient. I looked at these victims of Hitler's war and felt a great pity. The hopelessness in their faces brought a stark realization of suffering. We had heard rumors of their plight in the camp, they were now confirmed beyond our belief. Musing I took from my pocket a huge bar of red cross chocolate and begin to eat.

A young woman with fierce hysterical eyes gazed at the chocolate as if she had seen a ghost. I stared back at her uncomprehending. She spoke to an older woman and beside her and they looked at me in anger.

Immediately the crowd near us began to talk in threatening whispers. I heard the word tchokalade many times. Luteyn turned to me and frowned angrily. Slowly realizing the danger of my position, I put the chocolate back in my pocket. I had committed a terrible blunder. Chocolate had been unknown to working Germans for many months. Goering himself may well have tasted a little. We British prisoners were well supplied. To sit eating this for bidden delicacy in the waiting room of a great station made one not only an object of envy but a deep suspicion. We rose awkwardly and walked out of the waiting room into the town.

Leipzig at nine in the morning on January 6, 1942. The snow was clear from the streets and there was a distant hum of traffic in the sunshine. Military vehicles sped by us filled with hard-looking men. The sidewalks were a mass of field grey and the mauve-blue of the Luftwaffe. We stared into the shop windows gazing like children at expensive dresses and furs. Around us stiff, bourgeois young men in uniform tapped their smart black boots on the pavement as they stood before the shops. Blonde girls in short skirts looked up at the soldiers with fiercely possessive blue eyes and clutched them tightly.

We entered a big emporium and moved among bright lights and dance music and tinsel finery. We watched the people strolling by the counters. The Germans were young, confident, and hopeful and we, mere beggars with a few bars of precious chocolate, had only our own high courage between us and the enemy on every side. Only a few sad civilians of an older generation, shabby and worn, crept among the counters like wraiths. The Nazi Revolution of Destruction was at hand.

We were bitterly disappointed to see no sign of bombing, yet the civilians looked hungry and unhappy. We threaded our way through the crowd and came to a square of gardens where a few old men and women walked in the sunshine with their Dachshunds. I sat beside Luteyn on a seat watching their slow, hopeless perambulation among the snowbound flower beds and shrubs. For me the months of imprisonment were gone and past. I was a detached spectator watching Life go by. New sights and sounds, fresh and clear, came to me after the darkness of prison. Elderly businessmen and lawyers with briefcases under their arms marched past muttering somberly to each other. A girl left the procession of Life and sat beside me.

She was young and blonde and plainly of the working class. She looked at me sharply as she sat on the wooden seat. She wore a torn old overcoast and her short tight skirt was above her bare knees. She looked down at her shoes with ersatz wooden heels and kicked at a heap of snow. Her mouth was set in a hard determined line. Her prominent blue eyes held ruthlessness. I struggled to look at her calmly but with an inwardly beating heart.

"Good morning," she said. I dared not answer or risk conversation. She pouted.

"You are unsociable, my friend."

I turned to see Luteyn had already risen from the seat and was walking slowly away. I followed him in dismay and embarrassment and, for a moment, turned towards the girl. She was looking hard at us. I felt her blue eyes watching, deep with suspicion and annoyance. We hurried away and wandered among the side streets of Leipzig till it was noon.

A cinema in enemy territory is a fine hiding place for the fugitive. After a lunch of ersatz coffee we came to a cheap stuffy cinema at the bottom of an arcade. Luteyn bought the tickets. Our small stack of German marks was enough for only the cheapest seats. We stood, obediently waiting for the performance, regiment by a commissionaire. In a few minutes, we took our seats among German soldiers and sailors and their girls and waited for the curtain, and, as the lights went out, a tall young German officer came in alone and sat next to me.

We saw first on the program a news film of events in Libya. Rommel, standing beside a staff car in the desert, talking decisively; then excellent shots of panzers in action and a British plane being shot down. Close-ups followed a British pilot taken prisoner by the Germans and waving encouragement to his friend still fighting in the air. In my excitement I clutched the seat in front of me and was rewarded by the occupant turning around with a harsh whisper of protest.

The feelings of a prisoner who for many months has been shut out from the war and accustomed only to the crudest enemy propaganda are hard to describe. I could've wept from joy. At least the war was not yet lost. In the next part of the news film there came a most shattering revelation the scene was set in a Russian winter. Up a long snowbound hill German soldiers struggled against the blizzard, dragging guns and vehicles. There

were photographs of frozen bodies and men's limbs swollen to unrecognisable size with frostbite. If Goebbels wanted to impress the Germans with the sufferings of their troops to inspire them to greater sacrifices at home, he hid no detail of their hardships.

There was a shocked silence when the news film came to an end. The lights went up in the shabby hall while martial music played from a cracked loudspeaker. Young men and girls chanted Nazi songs and around us their clear voices sounded in perfect harmony. Only the old people were glum and quiet. The music changed to:

"We are marching against England!"

For a moment I caught my companion's eye and, with a faint grin on our faces, Luteyn and I sang loudly with the rest. The remainder of the program was a film set in early 19th-century Germany. The heroine, a hard-faced simpering creature, was surrounded by heavy Prussian admirers. The scene which won the most applause was that in which the witty girl took refuge in an earth closet at the bottom of the garden to repel their advances. It was a hut with two heart-shaped holes in the door to it she pointed knowingly as she entered. The Germans roared without restraint and we, unimpressed by their lavatory humor, were constrained to do the same for fear of detection.

In the early afternoon the snow begin to fall again and the streets of Leipzig seemed full of foreboding for us. We came again to the station waiting room and sat there, tired and cold and anxious. The numerous passengers in the waiting room, many poor and infirm, assembled for the night trains. Then came the men in uniform, elbowing all the civilians aside. I watched them closely. The bullying SS men, the clod-like infantrymen, and the pale and spectacled administrative clerks. All in uniform, they tramped over the gloomy station like locusts, demanding refreshment or newspapers or anything they wanted. Such is total war. Luteyn bought the tickets to Ulm. We had decided to change there and, if all went well, to take tickets to the Swiss frontier.

As it began to move we climbed the steps of a carriage and stood in the corridor. The compartment opposite was occupied by a single figure

in the uniform of the SS, I could see the man as we stood outside, a great ape-like person with a heavy jaw. His uniform was new and spotless and he crossed his legs which were in fine black boots as he read a newspaper with screaming red and black headlines. I caught only the word "Rommel." So that he should not watch us, we moved into the shadow at the end of the corridor and looked into the darkness where only a few pinpoints of light showed the effective blackout of the city. The train jolted over the points and gathered speed with piercing whistles. Above its rattle I heard the door of the compartment open, and turning my head saw the big SS man standing in the doorway. His hands were on each side of the entrance door and he spoke to us in a soft voice.

"Are you Jews?"

"Certainly not. We are Dutch," replied Luteyn.

"Good. Come in and sit here. This compartment was reserved, but my friends are not coming." We took our seats beside the big man who spoke very slowly to us, using simple phrases. His friendliness alarmed me.

"Where are you travelling?"

"To Ulm."

"Why?"

"We are Dutch electrical workers transferred there from Leipzig."

Luteyn was doing the talking. He had his genuine Dutch passport ready to produce in an emergency. Then the man turned to me and his stupid eyes examined my face, searching for something he did not understand.

"You are Dutch, too?"

"Yes."

"How are things in Holland?"

"We have not been there for some months. We have been in Leipzig since the summer."

Luteyn stayed awake according to our arrangement and I slept for a few hours until his turn came to sleep. I was awakened by a loud tapping on the glass of the door and two military policemen looked in. They checked the passes of the soldiers and even scrutinised the documents of the SS officer. They stopped for a moment to stare at our queerly tailored clothes. I wondered for a moment whether they would recognise the colour of RAF trousers, but the SS officer intervened importantly.

"These are *fremdarbeiter* (foreign workers). Dutch," he said with conviction. The military police hesitated, then turned away as if suspicious civilians were nothing to do with their department.

Towards four in the morning the train began to slow and came to a halt amid the sounds of a large station. In the gloom there was shouting and the bustle of passengers. I leant out of the window and saw on a sign before me the word "Regensburg." It was here that we were due to change for the train to Ulm and we stepped onto the platform in the sharp cold.

"Good-bye, Dutchmen," said the SS man pompously from inside the compartment.

When the train to Ulm had filled with passengers it left the station in a cloud of steam and we found seats in a compartment, again taking turns to keep awake. When dawn came I saw that we were travelling through the wintry countryside of Bavaria. The snow, collecting along the edges of the windows, framed a picture of white roofs and towers set in the hollows of the hills. Sometimes beside the track an autobahn stretched like a tape threading through the forests and long convoys of military vehicles moved into the mist.

At nine on the second morning of the escape the train drew into Ulm and we left it, making our way towards the booking office. Luteyn calmly asked the girl for two tickets to Singen on the Swiss frontier. She frowned and my heart began to sink. She asked for papers and we showed our papers to her. "I must fetch the railway police. Stay here."

We did not wish to run away, hoping that our papers would satisfy them. A fat, red-faced railway policeman in his dark blue uniform asked us why we wished to go to the frontier zone. Luteyn explained that we were due to begin work in Ulm on the morrow and wished to spend a short vacation. The policeman, looking baffled, released us and we started to leave the station, walking across the big square in front. There was a shout behind us. "Come back, gentlemen! I want to speak to you again."

The policeman took us to an office in the goods-yard where a thin, tight-lipped German railway police lieutenant sat at a desk. He examined our false papers with bewilderment. It appeared to me that the writing on it did not make sense to him. I could hardly stop myself from laughing

as he lifted them to the light, looking, no doubt, for watermarks. He was, however, impressed by Luteyn's Dutch passport and there seemed no inkling in his mind that we were escaped prisoners of war.

"I don't understand these men at all," he said helplessly. "Take them to the Labour Office. I wish someone would control these foreign workers more efficiently." We walked across the square outside the station escorted by another policeman with a revolver. We chatted gaily in German, complimenting the man on the beauties of the town of Ulm. He was flattered and asked us about our own country of Holland. So much did we win his confidence that when we reached the State Labour Office, where men in brown uniforms with spades stood guard at the entrance, he bade us walk up the steps on our own, saying he would wait for us.

His parting words were: "You speak good German. Go and report to the office on the first floor and I shall wait for you here."

Smiling to ourselves and hardly able to believe our good fortune, we climbed to the top floor of the building and it was not long before we discovered some stairs on the far side from the entrance. Hurrying down them we left by another door. Avoiding the policeman and the guards with spades, we made for the back streets of Ulm, and Luteyn bought a map of the surrounding country in a small shop. The cold had now become intense and, walking beyond the suburbs of Ulm, we left the snow-capped roofs of the university town behind us and hurried towards the town of Laupheim. It was nearly dusk when we reached the market-square and, asking the way to the station, we took tickets to Stockach, a village as near to the Swiss frontier as we dared to go.

The country folk on the platform watched us in silence as we sat upon a bench sleepily waiting for the train. When it arrived we entered a wooden compartment too tired to be able to take turns to stay awake. The train jolted on into the night. We reached Stockach about nine in the evening. Of Stockach I only remember white cottages in the moonlight and a doubtful station master watching us as we walked into the hills hoping to reach the frontier town of Singen when the moon went down and the frontier was in darkness. The road began to rise steeply through the forests and great banks of snow were on either side of us. Even by two o'clock in the morning we still had many miles to go, struggling along the icy road

as the moon began to wane. The road slowly descended towards Singen. It seemed hopeless to try to cross the frontier that night and we determined to look for somewhere to hide until the following evening.

At five o'clock on the morning of January 8th, we were still moving towards Singen. Lights showed ahead of us in the roadway and to our tired eyes they seemed welcoming and kind. Then the figures of four men appeared. They were woodcutters walking to work from Singen. They hailed us and we wished them good morning. Something about us surprised them.

"Are you Poles?" said one of them.

"Yes," replied Luteyn.

"I don't believe it," said another.

"Poles are not allowed out of their camp at five in the morning." Evidently there was a Polish labour camp in the neighbourhood. The four woodcutters looked startled and undecided. As for me, I was near to surrender. My feet seemed to be frozen in my boots as if in blocks of ice. I hardly cared that we had come so far only to be recaptured. I could only think of warm fires and beds.

"Go, Hans, fetch the police," said the oldest woodcutter. The man called Hans, who wheeled a bicycle, mounted it and rode off towards Singen. The remainder confronted us uncertainly. They did not try to detain us but stood irresolute and dumb. We suddenly realised that they were frightened of us. Without a word we dashed to the side of the road and into the forest, running in the snow until we sank exhausted. My breath came painfully and my head began to swim. I could not look at the whiteness around me without pain. We rose to our feet after a minute and began to move across a clearing. There was no sign of the woodcutters. As I walked there came over me a kind of delirium between sleep and waking. I thought that I was on some parade ground in England. I felt a figure beside me and turned to see my old colonel marching in the snow in his uniform and field boots. I spoke to him and addressed him respectfully.

"What the hell?" said Luteyn.

"It's all right," I said, ashamed. Luteyn grunted impatiently, and a few paces across the clearing we came to a large wooden hut surrounded by a fence. There was the outline of a pathway, shrubs and flower beds

in the snow, and beside the hut were beehives. We walked up to the hut and tried the doors which were all locked, but a small window in the wall was open. We lifted ourselves in and staggered crazily around the hut in the faint light of dawn. There was no sound of life. We found a kitchen and two rooms, in one of which there was a bed. Tired and faint, we lay together on the bed in the intense cold and, with an old blanket over us, fell into a deep sleep, not waking until the afternoon.

According to our map, we were in the middle of a forest, two or three miles from Singen. We planned, therefore, to leave the hut at dusk and walk along the road to the town. West of the town and to the south lay woods through which ran the road and railway line to Schaffhausen in Switzerland. At some points the road formed the frontier between Switzerland and Germany. Shortly before five o'clock on this afternoon of the eighth of January, we shouldered spades, and carrying the two white coats under our arms we cut through the forest to the road to Singen.

For more than a mile we saw no one on the road, then the lights of bicycles came towards us and a voice called "Halt." In the glow of the bicycle lamps I could see two boys in the uniform of the Hitler Youth, each armed with truncheons. I felt no fear of them. Refreshed by sleep, I was determined they should not stop us. The boys spoke in a hectoring fashion.

"What are your names and where are you going?"

"We are Westphalians working in the neighbourhood and we are going back to our lodgings in Singen," said the resourceful Luteyn. This was a good choice of disguise for the Dutch accent resembles that of the Westphalians. The boys seemed doubtful.

"What is wrong?" I said, trying to imitate Luteyn's accent.

"We have been told to look for two British prisoners who have escaped and are thought to be trying to cross the frontier tonight." We both laughed.

"They won't get far," said Luteyn, "it is much too cold for prisoners of war!"

Afterwards I asked Luteyn what was in his mind. "For me to kill one with my spade and you the other," he said. "What did you intend to do?"

"Exactly the same."

We passed through Singen in the blackout, without incident, and skirting a great dark mound which seemed to be a slag heap we set off southwards through the wood, marching upon a compass bearing to the frontier. At two o'clock in the morning on the ninth of January we crossed the railway to Schaffhausen about two miles north of a point where the road forms the frontier. It was a fine, cold night and the moon was full. Not far to the east were voices and lanterns and what appeared to be a frontier post. For an hour we crouched in a ditch beside the road and watched a sentry pacing up and down only forty yards away. Here we ate the remainder of our chocolate and swallowed a few mouthfuls of snow.

Black clouds began to hide the moon and the cold increased with a rising wind. I watched the German buttoning the collar of his overcoat and saw him move towards the sentry-box beside the frontier barrier. Before us across the roadway was a smooth plain of snow surrounded by distant trees. Beyond this few hundred yards of open No Man's Land was freedom. At half-past four in the morning the sentry turned away from us. I could no longer hear his footsteps against the wind.

"Do you agree to cross now?" said Luteyn.

"This is the moment," I whispered. We crawled from the ditch and across the road still dressed in our white coats. We continued crawling across the field in front of us, ploughing on hands and knees through the deep snow. After what seemed an eternity we rose to our feet, and surged forward into Switzerland.

Over the Swiss frontier, we came to very deep snowdrifts through which we stumbled and sometimes sank, having to drag each other to our feet. Sometimes neither of us could go further and for minutes lay panting and cursing. Luteyn, so calm and resourceful through these perilous days, began to talk despairingly in Dutch and seemed to be wandering in his mind. I pulled him from a deep drift where only his ski cap showed against that cruel whiteness. Then it was my turn to flounder, helpless and distraught, murmuring with a last attempt at humour that patriotism was not enough. It was an hour before we had travelled a quarter of a mile and found ourselves on higher ground. There came to us the sound of cow

bells, and a clock chimed the hour of five in sweet tones. Under our feet we felt with unspeakable relief the welcome surface of a road.

Suddenly, there were shadowy walls on either side. There was a row of small farmhouses and cow sheds. A single question tortured us. Were we in Switzerland? The buildings, faintly discerned, began to form a street with a church tower at its farthest end. The snow crunched loudly beneath our feet as we went by bounds from doorway to doorway watching and listening in terrible anxiety. I saw a blurred whiteness against the wall of a barn and I lit my petrol lighter. Pushing aside the snow, I could see an advertisement for a circus. There were elephants and tigers in gay colours and a ringmaster with a long moustache. And then, with pounding heart, I sought the place of the performance. We were at the Swiss village of Ramsen.

We had come through! We were the children who travelled beyond the Blue Mountains. We had reached the Promised Land. I thought of kneeling in the snow and thanking God for our deliverance. But there was little time for emotion. As we shook hands, the church clock of Ramsen struck a quarter-past five and there came the crisp sound of heavy boots along the street. We dashed into the shadows, watching in a torment of fear for the familiar steel helmet of a German guard. A tall man walked nonchalantly towards us. He wore a long, heavy green overcoat, a pointed hat with black band turned up at one side, and he carried a rifle. I recognized immediately that he was a Swiss frontier guard serenely patrolling the village.

My heart was beating so that I could hardly breathe. He came within a few yards and then we showed ourselves, appearing quietly before him. Startled, the guard took the rifle from his shoulder and pointed it at us.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Friends."

"Are you English?"

"Yes, and Dutch."

Then I could see that the guard was smiling. With shouts of joy we flung ourselves upon him, shaking him by the hand and patting his back. Then Luteyn, the guard with his rifle on his shoulder, and I clasped each other's hands and danced in the snow, pirouetting and leaping first one

way, then the other, so that the whole street echoed with our cheering. Lights came at the windows and voices asking in Swiss-German what it was all about. The little street seemed to be alive with our happiness. The guard shouted merrily, as if he was the most delighted man in the world, that we had escaped the tyranny of Hitler.

Despite the cold and the early hour the people clapped hands as they leaned from their windows. The three of us came to the Swiss frontier post and waited for an official to be roused from his bed. Standing beside a wood fire in the office, the sense of freedom surged through my veins like a cordial. Never in my life, perhaps, will I ever know such a moment of triumph.

Editor's note: In May 1942, after spending two years as a prisoner of war, Airey Neave would finally return home to England. Shortly thereafter he was recruited by MI9, the section of British intelligence that established escape and evasion routes for Allied airmen shot down over occupied Europe. After the war he would serve as an official of the international war crimes tribunal at Nuremberg and would be elected to the House of Commons in 1951. Becoming a formidable political operative within the Conservative Party, he was a key figure in Margaret Thatcher's rise to power in 1975. Airey Neave was assassinated by a car bomb detonated by the Irish National Liberation Army outside the House of Commons on March 30, 1979.

Chapter Three

Hero Found: Dieter Dengler's Escape from Laos

Bruce Henderson

Over the flight-deck loudspeaker boomed the orders from the air boss signifying the start of flight operations: "Secure loose gear. Put on flight goggles. Stand by to start all jets."

This morning the four Spads [propeller-driven Douglas A-1 Skyraider attack aircraft] at the stern would be last to launch.

In the cockpit, Dieter Dengler buckled his shoulder harness and seat belt, and slipped on the supple leather gloves meant to provide some protection against a cockpit fire. He left the canopy in the open position, where it would remain until he was aloft. As the jets were being launched, the Spads were started up under the direction of flight-deck personnel with the usual amount of backfiring and billowing smoke as the 2,700-horsepower radial engines came to life. Dieter checked his instruments, and everything looked good.

He switched his radio to Gray Eagle launch frequency. "Electron Five Zero Four, up and ready," he announced.

After the jets were launched, the Spads taxied forward. Dieter's plane was attached to the number three catapult, one of two cats located on the angled deck of the USS *Ranger*. At full power, the Spad revved up to a teeth-rattling 2,800 revolutions per minute and struggled mightily to break free of the steel bridle attached by cables to both inboard wings. The catapult officer—who was known as the shooter and wore a bright yellow vest for quick recognition—made sure the path in front of the plane was clear and everyone was ready who needed to be. Then, he crouched and

froze like a statue, his forward arm pointed dramatically in the direction in which the plane was about to be dispatched.

With a loud hiss and curls of steam escaping along the catapult track, the Spad was off. Once airborne, he proceeded about ten miles out to where the VA-145 planes were to rendezvous. At 2,000 feet, he set up a left orbit and waited. The others soon joined him. The four Spads went feet dry over North Vietnam twenty minutes after takeoff. The flight regularly changed altitude and heading so as to keep radar-controlled antiaircraft weapons from locking onto the inbound flight. The skies over the gulf had been crystalline blue, but the weather deteriorated inland. It was the coastal monsoon season, and they flew through a torrential downpour that lowered the ceiling and visibility. The rugged 1,370-foot pass was the gateway to Laos, and the principal point of entry to the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Looking down into Laos for the first time, Dieter saw a vast jungle—the "deepest green" he had ever seen—broken by an occasional outcrop of whitish, sharply chiseled cliffs. He thought the terrain looked "impenetrable." This was nothing like the tree-studded Black Forest he knew so well or the arid openness of Warner Springs, where he had displayed his escape and evasion skills.

The radio snapped to life with a report of a *Kitty Hawk* pilot going down in southern Laos. In the lead, "Spook" Johns decided, "The heck with the bombing mission"—helping rescue a downed pilot was more important. His told the others his plan: since they were only a few minutes away from their target, they would get rid of their bombs in a single run, then head south as a group to join the Rescue Combat Air Patrol (RESCAP).

Minutes later came another radio call from Spook: "Five Zero Seven, rolling in." Now that Spook had found the target, he would be the first to commence a glide-bombing attack in a west-northwest direction to drop all his five-hundred-pounders at once: nearly two tons of explosives. Each of the other pilots was to follow four or five seconds after the guy ahead of him had rolled in.

Dieter flipped on the master arming switch, and checked his altitude: nine thousand feet. He banked and yawed the plane until he had a better angle of attack. The Skyraider screamed earthward at about a fifty-degree

angle, accelerating to 400 miles per hour. Throwing his head back, Dieter was peering up at the approaching ground when his plane lurched and began to shake violently.

Dieter let go of the throttle and put both hands on the stick. He tried to call out to his squadron mates, but the radio was dead—"no side tone, no click, nothing." He let the nose fall through the dive until it was pointing down at the ground. He pressed the bomb release button on the control stick, sending all his bombs away. He pulled the stick to his belly, and with the extra weight gone the aircraft leaped. As the plane swooped like a hawk on a sudden updraft, Dieter was pressed into the seat by G forces that made him five or six times heavier than his normal weight. Keeping back pressure on the stick, he let the nose come level with the horizon. Suddenly, a bright explosion "like a lightning strike" off the right wing sent the plane "tumbling through the air." Pieces of metal flew past the canopy, and the engine stopped. Fighting to regain control, Dieter instinctively carried out the emergency procedures he had learned. His hands darted over the instruments, trying to restart the engine, which coughed once. Then, nothing.

With the engine gone, Dieter knew there was no hope of his making it back to the coast. He hit the switch to blow the canopy. The boom of the air-pressure bottle going off above his left shoulder was followed by the sound of air rushing overhead with the canopy gone. He unbuckled his shoulder harness and seat belt. He wore a seat-pack parachute, and the metal release handle was secured across his chest.

Off in the distance—about three or four miles away—Dieter saw what looked like a small clearing. It seemed an unbelievable stroke of luck. As he came closer, he began to think he might overshoot the field. Amazed that he could still steer the plane, Dieter began to swing it from side to side in order to drop lower. Passing over several huts on his left, he saw on the far side of the clearing a solid wall of trees. He would try to set down in the field short of the wooded area. His airspeed indicator showed 180 miles per hour, about sixty miles per hour faster than a normal landing, but there was little he could do to slow down. Only now did he realize that the clearing wasn't open ground after all but a field of trees that had been cut off at the height of three or four feet. The entire field—about

300 yards in length—was pockmarked with thick stumps and large felled trees. Dieter knew he had picked the wrong place to land, but his eight-ton plane had become the world's heaviest glider and there could be no change of plans now. Like it or not, he was coming down here.

On impact, the left wing swung forward and down, and as it did the wingtip struck the ground. The entire wing snapped off the fuselage. The plane's nose dug into the earth, the windmilling prop chopping up dirt and wood chips. Dieter held the stick in a death grip as the Spad bounced into the air, careened over to the right, and then began tumbling end over end.

A tree stump ripped through the side of the cockpit, narrowly missing Dieter's right leg. As the fuselage cartwheeled five or six times on the ground, he was pushed and pulled by the force of deceleration. His helmet was wrenched off his head and flew out the open cockpit. He watched a corner of the glass windscreen start to break in slow motion. When a big piece finally broke away, it struck him on one side of his head. Then, in a surreal scene, he watched the entire tail section tumble by. Smelling oil and gas and terrified of being burned, Dieter closed his eyes and covered his face with his arms.

When the world stopped spinning and the "continuous grinding and jerking" ended, he opened his eyes. He was hanging sideways in a darkened abyss. The cockpit was filled with green foliage and a thick dust that started him coughing. The fuselage was on one side, and the metal rail for the canopy was bent inward, jamming into his side. He managed to unbuckle his shoulder harness and seat belt but found that he was still caught and couldn't get out. Then, he passed out. When he came to, he was on his back 100 feet away.

Dazed, he looked at the wreckage. He was surprised that there was no fire. A load of aviation gas remained in the internal fuel tank, as the drop tanks were routinely used up first. He remembered turning off the gas, battery, and ignition in the last moments before the plane hit the ground. He had no recollection, however, of getting out of the plane. He was still wearing his survival vest and waist pack, and next to him were a few things he had obviously taken from the cockpit. He tested his limbs to see if they all worked; his left knee hurt, but nothing seemed to be broken.

He knew the locals would come looking for him. The sound of the crash had been thunderous, and those huts he had seen were only a short distance away. He rose to his feet, and "stumbling and falling like a drunkard" he moved as quickly as he could through the clearing toward the jungle.

When he reached the end of the clearing, he stopped. Steadying himself on weak legs, he took a last look back. A cloud of dust from the crash still swirled above the wrecked Spad that had brought him safely down to the ground.

Then, Dieter stepped into the jungle.

The three Spads circled nearby, waiting for Dieter. When he didn't appear, Spook radioed: "Zero Four, check in."

Spook tried again. "Electron Five Zero Four. Hey, check in."

The assignment the next morning to look for Dieter went to his best buddy, Lizard Lessard; and his flight leader, Lieutenant Commander John Stovall, thirty-three, of Kermit, Texas (who was called "Smokey" because he always had a cigarette going). Stovall "liked Dieter and got along with him," and Lizard knew his flight leader would want them to give it their best shot in locating Dieter.

So eager was everyone in the chain of command—including *Ranger*'s skipper, Leo McCuddin—to begin a search for VA-145's missing pilot at first light over Laos that the two Spads were sent off in a special launch an hour before sunrise—some five hours before the start of *Ranger*'s regular flight operations that day.

When the Spads reached the search area an hour later, a blood-orange dawn was breaking over Laos. Starting at the river crossing, heavily cratered from the previous day's attack, the two planes began a methodical "square search pattern." They went in one direction for a minute, then turned left at timed intervals to form an ever-expanding box. Flying mostly between five hundred and one thousand feet, depending on the terrain, Stovall was in the lead with Lessard above and behind his right wing. Both pilots scanned below for any sign of an aircraft down or an emergency signal. At the same time, Stovall was responsible for keeping

them high enough to clear ridges and hills, and it was Lessard's job to follow his flight leader's altitude and course changes.

About an hour later, their search pattern took them over a long wooded ridge that ran east to west. After passing over it, they soon spotted a small clearing a few miles to the north. Coming closer, they saw wreckage that was identifiable to them as an airplane. Dropping down near treetop level, they confirmed four main pieces strewn on the ground: a tail section, a denuded fuselage, a partial wing, and an intact wing. All were painted in the navy aircraft color scheme: light gull gray on top and glossy white on the bottom sections. The intact wing had a white star set in a blue field with red and white stripes. On the fuselage was painted the willow-green diagonal stripe of the Swordsmen's insignia, with a lion raising a medieval sword. On the engine cowling, painted in black, were the numbers 504.

Quickly reporting the sighting, they were told that a US Air Force helicopter—from a base at Nakhon Phanom in northeastern Thailand—would be en route, along with a search-and-rescue (SAR) coordinator aboard a four-engine C-54 Skymaster, equipped as a radio relay station to provide command and control for rescue missions involving multiple aircraft. Lessard and Stovall would wait to guide them to the wreckage; carrying a full complement of rockets, bombs, and ammunition for their 20 mm cannons, they would provide protective air cover.

As Lessard passed low over the wreckage, which lay at the end of a rut plainly made in the yellowish-brown soil by the careening plane, he looked for any indication that the crash had been survivable. Two things gave Lessard hope. First, the cockpit and fuselage were intact. If Dieter had been strapped in, he would have had a chance. Also, there was no sign of a fire. But if Dieter had survived, where was he now? Lessard kept hoping to see him step out of the foliage, waving skyward.

When the helicopter arrived, it was an HH-3E, nicknamed the Jolly Green Giant—a twin-engine, heavy-lift helicopter used for search and recovery as well as combat and special operations. With titanium armor plating and a high-speed rescue hoist, it was a welcome sight overhead to any downed aviator. The problem—as radioed by Stovall to the SAR units—was that there had been no sighting of the pilot and no signal

from him since they had been overhead. That meant the helicopter would have to hover near the wreckage and send down an armed crewman to look for an injured or dead pilot in the wreckage.

By then, Stovall and Lessard had been in the air for more than five hours, and they faced an hour's flight back to the ship. Before departing, Lessard took another look at the broken plane in the clearing. Knowing Dieter, he was willing to bet that his friend's body was not inside the wreckage. And if there was no body, where was Dieter? The only Americans who had penetrated this deep into Laos on foot were Special Forces reconnaissance teams. It was isolated, hostile country.

Not long after Stovall and Lessard returned to the ship, *Ranger* sent out a secret radio message based on their report and an update from the SAR units after the wreckage had been searched. The message was addressed to CINCPAC—the commander in chief of all forces in the Pacific—and various naval commands in the Pacific and continental United States:

> *SEARCH FOR PILOT OF MISSING A1H RENEWED AT 0710H. WRECK OF ELECTRON 504 FOUND BY RANGER A1H AT 17-42-30N/105-15-45E. WHEN RANGER A1H LEFT SAR SCENE AT 1115H, A C-54 AND TWO A1E AND HELO WERE OVER THE WRECK. MISSING AIRCRAFT CHECKED BY HELO CREW. NO EVIDENCE OF BLOOD IN COCKPIT AND NO TRACE OF PILOT IN AREA. LAP BELT AND SHOULDER HARNESS HAD BEEN RELEASED AND NOT BROKEN. CANOPY NOT NEAR AIRCRAFT.*

Dieter wanted to scream out, and he would have if the pilots above could somehow have heard him. It was "sickening" that rescuers were so close but had no idea he was here. Had he been able to stay near the crash site and avoid capture, they would now be pulling him out of the jungle. But he had come close to being killed or captured, and the fact that he was still alive and free meant everything. And then, he was spotted—not by the planes but by the Laotians who were looking for him. Two natives with machetes

stepped from the tall grass and looked toward Dieter, who was still waving the pole trying to signal the planes. From all the voices and commotion that immediately followed, he knew there were others behind them. Dieter jumped down from the hut and ran for the river. Diving in, he swam to the other side. Scrambling up the steep bank, he looked back only when he was hidden in the bushes. Several men—some with rifles—were gathered on the opposite bank. One of them pointed in Dieter's direction. Someone had found a raft, and they were preparing to cross.

Dieter hurried away. As the terrain changed again, from woods to jungle, he pressed on, and no one seemed to be following him. He arrived at an elevated hut in the "middle of nowhere." The front door was open. Dieter sat underneath the hut to catch his breath. To his surprise, he heard chickens clucking. He found them inside a bamboo cage. He took a fat hen and put it in his bag to roast over a fire later. He came to a second hut a short distance away. It was so hidden by foliage that he nearly bumped into it. As he passed, he grabbed a handful of ash in the outside fire pit. Dropping embers that burned the palm of his hand, he knew someone had been here recently. It occurred to Dieter that he was taking too many chances. He had no business approaching huts or villages. He should he traveling "deeper in the bush," even if it slowed him down. Right now, someone could be watching him without his knowing it. No sooner did that thought cross his mind than a woman dressed in black came around the corner of the nearest hut and stopped. She looked back, called out to someone, and a small child appeared. She scooped up the child in her arms and walked off. Dieter had stepped into the foliage at the edge of the clearing to hide. He didn't think the woman had seen him—at least, she didn't act as if she had. But this was too close a call. His next thought was that he should not get caught with "stolen goods." He let the chicken go. Now that he was determined to avoid huts and stay off trails, the going was slower and more difficult. He worked his way through the jungle, trying not to make any noise and watching for animal traps as he went.

When Dieter arrived at an intersection of several trails, he checked to the left and right, and saw no one approaching. It was only twenty feet across, not far at all, he thought. Crouching low, he started to cross—

"*Yute, yute, yute*!"

When Dieter heard the shouted order, he knew it was meant for him. He stopped and turned slowly toward the commanding voice.

An M-1 rifle was pointed at his head. Dieter smiled and nodded. The man holding the rifle motioned for Dieter to come closer. Dieter did, careful not to make any sudden moves. The man yelled something over his shoulder, and the bush "came alive" with more Laotians in various states of dress and undress. Some obviously were local villagers, and they stood back, watching.

The man pointing the rifle wore aviator sunglasses, a US Army fatigue jacket, rolled-up brown pants, and pastel-blue rubber boots like those an older woman might wear for a rainy-day stroll in Central Park. Because of the man's western if "comically" mismatched attire, Dieter wondered if he was a friendly guerrilla. Just then, the man whipped out a .38 revolver from his waistband and waved it at Dieter, yelling menacingly. Not friendlies, he decided. Pathet Lao.

"*Nicht schiessen*," Dieter said calmly, asking them in German not to shoot.

The prison camp looked new, and it was easy to believe what they were told: no prisoners had been kept here before. The site was better camouflaged by the encroaching jungle than the other camps and would be harder to spot from the air. The new camp was closely surrounded on all sides by woods and jungle, and to the south a high ridgeline was visible, covered with an emerald blanket of trees. The prison compound—a clearing studded with six or seven trees—was about forty by forty feet. It was enclosed by a fifteen-foot woven bamboo fence, which had one guarded gate that opened onto a dirt path. To the left was a nearby stream and camp latrine, and to the right was the route to the village of Ban Hoeui Het several miles away. Outside the fence at either end of the compound was a thirty-foot guard tower that overlooked the yard from front to back. Also outside the walls were half a dozen guard huts, including one used for food preparation. Inside the stockade were two cells: identical log-and-bamboo huts with thatched, leaf-covered roofs. They were each eighteen feet long and six feet wide.

By the time they arrived at their new camp, the main issue of contention for the prisoners had become the escape plan, with everyone having his own idea of what would and would not work.

Dieter's plan was to steal weapons from the guards, kill them, and collect all the supplies in camp. After that, they would hold the camp and signal one of the planes that regularly flew overhead. Dieter's fellow prisoner of war, Duane Martin, an air force helicopter pilot, had recognized the sound of a four-engine US Air Force C-130 Hercules transport, overhead most nights. If that didn't work they would find a river, either steal a native boat or build a raft from bamboo and banana trees, and float down a tributary to South Vietnam or Thailand, traveling by night and hiding by day.

None of the other prisoners, Duane included, liked the idea of killing the guards. They discussed how under international law a prisoner of war who killed a guard while escaping could be executed upon recapture. The other prisoners did not want to take that chance. In fact, Phisit Promsuwan, one of the Thai prisoners in the camp, was opposed to any escape attempt. He announced that he would not assist the others or join them in their planned escape. He said the whole idea was "crazy," and that he didn't intend to get himself killed because of an "escape-happy guy" like Dieter. When Dieter and Duane explained that US military personnel taken prisoner were required by their code of conduct to resist and make every effort to escape, and upon their return home could be court-martialed for failing to do so, Phisit "listened and thought it was funny."

For days, Duane argued with Phisit about the escape, to the point that the two men stopped talking to each other. When Phisit, in a huff, demanded that the escape be shelved because if all the other prisoners broke out he could be killed in retaliation, Dieter blew up.

"Go to hell!" he yelled at Phisit. "I'm going even if I have to go alone! I'm not going to rot away the way you've done for three years."

The prisoners became keen observers of the camp routine, looking for any openings or opportunities they might exploit to break out of the compound. Each morning, a group of guards would take the prisoners one at a time to a nearby stream, where they would dump out their waste containers. Every three days they were allowed to wash their clothes and bathe in the same stream. The prisoners were not put back into their huts

until after breakfast, and could spend the time walking within the perimeter of the compound. Most days, guards climbed into the two gun towers. At mealtime, all the guards gathered outside the compound walls in a kitchen hut where the food was prepared. This was the only time the guards were separated from their weapons. Even those on guard duty in the towers left their guns behind, and others not on guard duty left the guns in their huts located outside the compound. Everyone went to the kitchen and put food onto the turtle shells used for plates, with most returning to the huts or towers to eat.

With the prison camp receiving decreased rations of rice from local villages, the guards organized supply missions to other regions to bring back larger quantities of rice. Typically, the round-trip took at least two weeks. On the journey back, the guards and village porters carrying the loads would eat much of the rice. By the time they returned to camp, there was often only enough to last a week or ten days.

The lack of food put the guards on edge. They became meaner, and quicker to beat the prisoners, who worried that the guards might look for an excuse to kill them so as not to have to feed them.

By mid-June the rains had still not come. Realizing that they were becoming weaker every day, Dieter and Duane decided to make their try before July 4, with or without the monsoons. That seemed to the US pilots an appropriate date to "either be free or dead." A few days later, Thanee overheard the guards discussing what to do with the prisoners. It was decided that they should be shot, and their bodies dragged into the jungle to make it look as if they had been killed while trying to escape. With their demise, the prison camp would be empty and the guards could return home to their villages, where there was more food.

"That's it!" Dieter exclaimed. "That's the signal. I'm getting out of this joint."

As it happened, nine guards were away on a rice-gathering mission, leaving seven guards behind. That meant seven prisoners versus seven guards: "even odds for once," Dieter pointed out. Without a voice of dissent, the prisoners came to a decision. They would carry out the escape plan right away.

In Dieter's mind, there was no contingency for failure. If they tried to escape and failed, he expected either to be killed in the attempt—his preference—or executed soon thereafter. There had never been a real alternative for him. Even before the prisoners heard about the guards' plan to kill them, he had not intended to waste away slowly in a jungle prison camp and die from disease, starvation, or beatings.

Weeks earlier, the prisoners had loosened a large support pole in the American hut by pouring water and urine at its base and working it back and forth until they could lift it out. After loosening some logs close to the floorboards, they now had a way to leave the hut quickly. Then, they put everything back and "covered up all traces" of their preparation. Dieter had also dug a hole underneath the fence next to the hut, then covered it up with leaves and bamboo. He had accomplished all this when the prisoners were still being let out of their huts for long periods in the morning, and when the guards in the gun towers were napping or otherwise inattentive, as they often were.

The prisoners had agreed that if they could not stay at the camp to make contact with planes overhead, they would split into two groups before fleeing overland. Earlier, there had been talk of staying together as one group, but Dieter was opposed to the idea. Such a large group would be easier to track. Also, if they had to hump through the jungle to freedom, Dieter wanted to be with Duane and Gene DeBruin, a CIA pilot who had been shot down and captured two and a half years earlier. The three Americans got along and trusted one another.

The three Thai who were the surviving crewmen from Gene's downed *Air America* cargo plane were a natural team, and given how well Phisit, the former paratrooper, knew the jungle, Dieter figured they had an excellent chance of making it. In fact, Phisit offered tips to the Americans about finding food in the jungle, such as edible ferns that grew along the waterways and figs that could be eaten green or ripe. The three Thai told about the hospitality of their people, especially the monks, and suggested that if the Americans made it across the border into Thailand they should seek refuge at a temple until they could make contact with friendly forces. The Thai and the Americans were in agreement that, with impenetrable

jungle, at least two mountain ranges, and North Vietnam to the east, westward was the way to proceed.

The oldest prisoner, Y.C., the Chinese radio operator, was the odd man out. He was set to travel with the Thai group, but he suddenly fell ill with what was believed to be elephantiasis, a tropical disease caused by parasitic worms transmitted by mosquitoes. It left his legs weak and swollen, and his scrotum badly distended. In severe pain, he could barely walk. The Thai balked at taking Y.C. with them.

The Americans talked it over. If they were able to hold the camp, make air contact, and set up a rescue operation from here, Y.C.'s condition would not be an issue. But if they had to head for Thailand and evade enemy trackers en route, there was no way he could keep up. It would be terrible to condemn a fellow prisoner to certain death, and they struggled with the dilemma. Yet everyone knew they would be at a distinct disadvantage carrying a sick man who had trouble walking.

Finally, Gene said he and Y.C. would go together. They would make it over the first ridge to the south, then "lie in wait for air contact."

"Don't be a fool," Dieter said. "We want you with us."

"And I want Y.C.," Gene said, adding that if Dieter and Duane were rescued, "be sure someone looks for us and tell them where to look."

As 4 p.m. approached on June 29, 1966, Phisit again turned "worried and cautious," sending word that maybe the escape should be put off again. Dieter's response: "Not on your life." In the Asian prisoners' hut, which was closest to the kitchen, Thanee was counting the guards as they arrived for food. He passed the information to Y.C., who was squatting in the doorway. In English, Y.C. called out in a hushed voice to Duane, stationed in the doorway of the American hut, and Duane passed the word to Dieter and Gene.

"Guards entering kitchen."

"Guards don't have weapons."

They waited for the final count.

"All in the kitchen, but one's missing," Duane said urgently.

They speculated that the missing guard might have gone to check animal traps in the woods.

"Hell, let's go," Dieter said. Duane and Gene agreed.

"It's on," Duane called out in a stage whisper to the other hut.

Dieter pulled out the loosened pole and logs, and climbed out the opening. Burrowing under the fence like a groundhog, Dieter squeezed through and headed for the nearest guard hut. He leaped onto the porch and crept across the bamboo flooring, which creaked with his every move. Inside, he found two Chinese-made rifles and a US M-1 carbine with a full fifteen-round magazine. While he was with the air force shooting team, he had spent many hours on the range firing M-1s, and had become a skilled marksman with the weapon; he would keep this lightweight, semiautomatic weapon for himself. On the way out he picked up a full ammunition belt with extra magazines.

As he came off the porch, other prisoners were emerging from under the fence. Gene was already making his way down the fence line toward the rear of the compound. Phisit and Prasit came toward Dieter, who gave them the loaded Chinese rifles and some ammo. The two Thai headed off in the direction of the kitchen, with Duane following.

Dieter caught up with Gene. As they rounded the corner under the now empty gun tower, Gene peeled off for the hut where the guard on tower duty routinely left the Thompson submachine gun before going for food. As soon as Dieter rounded the far corner of the stockade, he could see the guards milling about inside the open-walled kitchen hut.

The next instant the guards "realized something was going on" and began yelling at each other and scrambling from the kitchen. They ran not toward the front of the stockade—the direction from which the Thai should have been coming—but toward Dieter.

"Yute! Yute!" yelled Dieter. He pressed the butt of the M-1 tightly between his chest muscle and the front ball of his shoulder, tilting his head so that his closer eye looked straight down the top of the barrel. His index finger rested lightly on the trigger.

At that moment a shot rang out. Dieter felt the speeding bullet whiz past his head. He spotted a guard in the kitchen with a rifle pointed his way. So much for the theory that the guards had no weapons! Dieter squeezed the trigger, and dropped with one shot the guard who had fired at him.

Amid excited screams, the horde of guards closed on Dieter, who felt "all alone…out in the open." He wondered what happened to the Thai, who were armed with the Chinese rifles, and to Gene, with the submachine gun. Running for Dieter at full speed, with a machete held menacingly over his head, was the guard they had named Moron. From a few feet away, Dieter fired point-blank at the bare chest of the guard who had once beaten him for taking a pig's corncob. The force of the blast lifted Moron off the ground, threw him back several feet, and spun him around. His limp body fell to the ground "dead right on the spot" with a sizable exit hole in the center of his back.

Dieter swung around to see another guard with a machete trying to out-flank him. The M-1 fired only once each time the trigger was pulled, but by rapidly squeezing and releasing the trigger he got off a fast rate of fire. The second guard collapsed on the ground, holding his side and shrieking. With no hesitation, Dieter fired again, to "finish him off."

The remaining guards were now trying frantically to reach the jungle.

"Where the *hell* is everybody?" Dieter yelled. Then, like a backwoods man on a squirrel hunt, he steadied himself and opened fire. He hit one more guard through the neck as the man ran away. Needing to reload, Dieter slammed home a new magazine. He shot another guard who was just entering the jungle. The guard dropped from sight but then sprang up holding one arm. Dieter kept "banging away" as the guard vanished ghostlike into the thick vegetation.

Duane came running up carrying a carbine he had found in a guard hut. "The clip—the clip," he stammered, explaining that it had fallen out every time he tried to release the safety to fire the weapon.

Dieter showed him why—he had been pressing the clip release, not the safety.

At least one guard had gotten away. There was also still the missing seventh guard, who could be nearby. In spite of all the dead men sprawled on the ground—guards who would never again abuse POWs—the outcome was disastrous, given that the plan had been to capture the guards without firing a shot and without letting anyone get away. The prisoners' bold plan to hold the camp and make air contact was no longer feasible.

They had no choice now. They would have to gather whatever supplies they could find and head into the jungle.

When Dieter went to retrieve his and Duane's boots from where they had been hanging under a hut with the other shoes, they were gone. He knew exactly who had taken them: the Thai, who had gotten there first, and had also "picked clean" all the mosquito nets and anything else they thought they could use, without offering to share with the others. Carrying stuffed rucksacks, they had been the first to leave the camp. Dieter and Gene had an emotional farewell. Gene had found the submachine gun in the guard hut, although when he stepped outside the shooting was over. He now had the weapon slung over one shoulder. As they shook hands, Dieter looked into Gene's face and wanted to say that Gene should come with him and Duane instead of remaining behind near the camp. But Dieter knew Gene had his mind made up and would not leave his sick friend behind. Unable to find the words he wanted to say to his fellow American, Dieter shook Gene's hand warmly.

"Go on, go on," Gene implored him. "See you in the States."

Dieter and Duane took off toward the west and Thailand, although because of the dense foliage, in an hour they had "no more reference" as to direction and could not see more than five feet ahead. In their weakened condition, and unaccustomed to exercise, they started "vomiting right away." They were soon held up by a solid wall of bramble bush. The camp dog had followed them, barking, and they were afraid he would give them away. The dog had his own escape plan, however, and before disappearing into the woods he found a dugout corridor under the thicket; Dieter and Duane crawled through after him. A short time later they reached a ridge. Exhausted, they fell to the ground. When they had recovered, Duane wanted to offer a prayer. They came up on their knees, with eyes closed and hands folded before them.

"God, please help us now. Please let us live."

After being wet and cold for days, they were both badly congested. They continued along a creek, which narrowed into a slippery, rocky gully, over which they "half-walked [and] half-crawled." Blocked by a pile of

bamboo in the creek bed, they struggled to get around it. When the gully came to an abrupt end, so did the creek.

Facing a steep divide between cloud-covered mountaintops, they decided to hike over it with the hope there would be a valley with a river on the other side. The ascent, steeper than it looked, was covered by "thousands of years of jungle growth." It "was an inhospitable world, with no sun or sky visible through the green ceiling, and thick walls of trees and vines blocking their way. After a few hours they had advanced only about three hundred feet in pouring rain. They could see that they would have to climb another two or three thousand feet through the dense vegetation to get over the pass. They trudged on a while longer until Dieter called a halt.

"Duane, it's no good," he said. "We can't hack this."

They were both panting, struggling for breath.

"We can't travel—over mountains," Dieter said. "It'd take two days to get over this ridge. Let's go back. Keep looking for a river."

Duane commented that it was going to be a lot easier sliding down the mountain than it had been climbing up. And they did go back faster, through mud and muck all the way to where the gully had ended, then retraced their steps a while longer before stopping for the night. The day had involved more exertion than any other since their escape, and at the same time they were rapidly deteriorating physically. And yet, when it was over, they had only ended up back where they had started.

Turning his head away, Dieter quietly let tears of frustration flow.

He had lost track of the date, and did not know it was July 4.

Awakened by the sound of C-130 engines, they jumped up. Their fire had nearly burned out, but there were enough coals left to light their leafy torches. This time, instead of continuing on, the plane added power and turned. The pilot seemed to have seen them, and was setting up a circle pattern directly overhead.

Duane began yelling loud enough to bring every Pathet Lao within miles to their location. "He sees us! We'll be safe! Oh, God, he sees us!"

Dieter admonished him to "shut up."

"I'm sorry, Dieter," Duane said in a softer voice. "He's circling and taking a bearing and distance reading on this place." Duane said that this was what an air force crew did to help a rescue helicopter find the location at daybreak.

The plane dropped two flares, one after the other. As they swung slowly to earth under parachutes, the flares lit up the night sky as if it were daytime. Duane and Dieter were both struck utterly silent as they watched, trying to come to grips with the fact that they had been seen—really seen—by the US Air Force and would soon be rescued.

Far too excited to sleep, they talked as if they were home free.

"We finally made it," Duane said wistfully.

"In less than four hours, we'll be in a chopper," Dieter agreed.

By morning, the overcast had returned, along with light rain. When no helicopter arrived, Duane said, "Don't worry." The ceiling was too low for a helicopter, he explained. They should give it some time.

Part of Dieter wasn't accepting the weather as an excuse, because it didn't look that bad to him. But like Duane, he wanted to keep believing.

By noon, they accepted reality: nobody was coming for them.

"You idiots!" Dieter yelled up to the empty, gloomy sky. "What's the matter with you? Don't you know we've broken out?"

Duane said the other prisoners—the Thai, Gene, and Y.C.—must have not made it either, or rescue aircraft would be out searching.

After a while, Duane moaned. "Goddammit, why don't we just die." He then lay on the ground as if that was exactly what he intended to do. And he did, in fact, become sicker as the day wore on, with a bad cough and a high fever. Dieter realized that Duane was nothing but "skin and bones."

Dieter's vision had started to blur again, and Duane had told him the whites of his eyes were yellow, a sign of jaundice. So were Duane's. Dieter's urine had been "black like tar" for days, and Duane reported his was, too. Dieter had been frightened while relieving himself a few days earlier to see that his feces were laced with wiggling little worms. When Dieter told Duane, he responded, "Yeah, mine's been the same for the past three days." Dieter's lungs were hurting again. But he was not ready to lie down and die. He would keep fighting to get home, and he was determined to

bring Duane back with him. That afternoon, Dieter took an empty container to the river and returned with water, which he began dabbing on Duane to cool him down.

Duane pushed him away. "Leave me alone! I want to die here."

"Hell, no. You're going to get out of here when I get out of here."

"Go on, Dieter. I don't want you around here anymore. I want to die by myself. Just tell Dorcas everything. I'm going to die right here."

"Nobody's going to die here." As Dieter said it, he wasn't sure he believed it. He wasn't even sure they would make it through the night.

In the morning, Duane was willing to take a gamble to stay alive.

They had skirted around a village as they came back up the river a couple of days earlier. From what they had seen, it looked peaceful, with locals tending to their gardens, orchards, and livestock.

"I'm going back there to get some food," Duane announced. "Then I'll try to get away." He said he would bring back whatever food he got.

Dieter didn't like the sound of it. "You don't have the strength to make it there and get back. You're not in any condition to pull it off."

"It's all there is left to do. We can't go on like this anymore."

"Okay, Duane, but I'm going with you. We're going to go through this thing together."

It took them two hours to get to the outskirts of the village. Most of the time they stayed low, crawling. They stopped frequently to rest. They continued on a trail through waist-high grass, proceeding side by side on their hands and knees. They were both "so exhausted" and "drained" by the physical exertion that Dieter wasn't sure they could even stand at this point, let alone walk. When the trail narrowed, Duane moved ahead. Dieter whispered to him to be careful.

"The villagers have to be around somewhere," Dieter added softly as the trail dipped into a small, muddy gully. When they came out of the gully, the path made a sharp right turn around a cluster of tall bamboo.

The next thing Dieter knew, there was a boy carrying water containers who had stopped a few feet off the trail and was watching them.

Dieter and Duane both smiled, and said, "Sabay."

At the greeting, the boy nodded and went down the trail.

A few seconds later, Dieter heard someone on his right yell, "Americali!" The villagers, who had been nowhere to be found, suddenly seemed to be all around "running and screaming." A wild-eyed young man in a loincloth jumped in front of Duane, swinging a long machete above his head with both hands.

Duane was on his knees, holding the palms and fingers of both hands together in front of him, in a pose of respectful salutation practiced by Buddhists.

"Sabay," said Dieter, also on his knees, clasping his hands together.

The villager hesitated, then dropped the blade on Duane. It landed deep in his thigh, slightly below the groin. Duane bent over, grabbing his leg as the man brought the bloody machete back above his head.

Duane's hideous screams were cut short when the blade fell again, chopping through the back of his neck.

A stunned Dieter watched as his friend's dismembered head fell "onto the trail, and blood spurted from his neck in long, pulsating leaps."

Dieter jumped up as the villager swung the machete at him. He ducked under the blow and threw his hands forward. The villager turned and ran up the trail. Dieter stumbled off in the direction he and Duane had come. He ran through the gully on wobbly legs, and when he made the turn at the cluster of bamboo he stepped off the trail. He had gone only about twenty feet into the jungle when several villagers with machetes ran past on the trail in the direction he had been going.

The "reality and horror" of the situation were still catching up with Dieter, but he knew one thing: he had to run for his life. He dropped into another gully and ran for about three hundred yards before reaching dense jungle. Looking back, he realized he had left deep footprints in the mud. He carefully backed up in his own footprints for a distance before leaping onto a rock. Then he moved off in another direction by stepping on rocks and piles of leaves so as not to leave prints. Getting through the dense jungle was hellish, but that didn't matter anymore. He stopped every ten seconds or so to listen for anyone approaching, and was careful not to break off branches that would give away his movements to an experienced tracker.

After about forty-five minutes he came to a wide trail. He stopped and listened but didn't see or hear anything. He quickly jumped across and went about ten feet into the bush, where he sat on his haunches to rest.

"It wasn't ten seconds" before five natives, all armed with rifles, hurried past on the trail. One of them, a woman, stopped right where Dieter had crossed the trail. She faced the other way, searching the bush for any signs of movement, as the others continued down the path.

Starved and weak, Dieter had very little physical strength left. Dying would be easier than staying alive, and he knew he was close to crossing over. And yet he was not ready to give up. While there was no physical or logical reason for it, his will to live had not yet been extinguished.

Across from him, in the hollow of another rock, Dieter saw a brightly colored snake. Without giving any thought to whether or not it was poisonous, he reached for the snake, taking the head in one hand and the tail in the other. Pulling the snake taut, he bit it in half. The "long brown liver" was hanging out as both ends of the snake coiled around his hands. Dieter ate the liver first, "then kept eating until one-half of the snake was gone. The other half he put in his rucksack.

He lay on the rock to rest for a minute, or for an hour.

He heard the sound of an approaching truck in the background.

Listening closer, he realized that the familiar sound was not a truck at all.

It was a Spad, coming down low, very low, over the river.

So far that morning nothing had gone right for US Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Eugene P. Deatrick, forty-two, of Morgantown, West Virginia. Twice, he and his wingman had taken off from Pleiku Air Base in South Vietnam on an armed reconnaissance mission to Laos, only to be forced back. First, there had been trouble with Deatrick's radio, then his wingman's plane developed a mechanical problem.

The genial, pipe-smoking Deatrick had been commanding officer of the 1st Air Commando Squadron only four months. Ironically, after his

years of test-piloting the air force's hottest new jets, Deatrick's first combat command was a squadron of A-1 Skyraiders.

When they were finally on their way that morning, Deatrick and his wingman headed across the Thai border to Laos. About an hour into the flight, they had seen all the usual sights—jungle, scattered woods, and a few rice paddies—but no targets of opportunity.

Deatrick, a barnstormer at heart, made sure he did "all the buzzing down low" whenever possible. He dropped to a couple of hundred feet. When he came to a sharp bend in the river, he banked ninety degrees to follow it. For the few seconds that his left wing was pointed straight down, he was able to get an unobstructed look at the ground directly below. When he did, he saw what appeared to be a "merry little fisherman" on the river, waving. Passing over at 150 miles per hour, Deatrick went by in a flash and flew upriver for five minutes before something—"I'll never know what"—told him to go back and take another look. He came in steeply banked again so he could look down at the ground.

Circling above, the wingman reported, "It looks like there's an SOS written on a rock."

Deatrick gained some altitude and radioed to the airborne command aircraft for the southern Laos region—a four-engine Lockheed HC-130 orbiting near the Laotian–North Vietnamese border. Call sign Crown, the HC-130, a new search-and-rescue (SAR) version of the C-130 Hercules transport, with a crew of seven, was responsible for assembling and managing SAR efforts looking for downed flyers, and for serving as a communications link between the SAR units and other commands.

Identifying himself by his call sign, Hobo 25, Deatrick asked, "Anyone been shot down in this area?"

"Negative," the Crown air controller reported.

"Nothing? Air force, navy, marines, Thai, Vietnamese?"

"No one is down today."

Deatrick knew about the enemy's tactics to try to "suck in and take out" rescue helicopters. This could well be a trap. The fisherman could have a grenade under his clothing and wait to be hoisted up to a chopper before pulling the pin. Deatrick got back to Crown. "Here's the situation. We've got a nut down here who has an SOS written on a rock."

"What does he look like?" Crown asked.

Deatrick had to bite his tongue not to laugh at the question. "Look, I think we ought to try to get this guy out," he said, explaining that he would stay on the scene to direct a rescue helicopter. He had made his recommendation, but he could be overruled by higher-ups.

US Air Force Captain William "Skip" Cowell, thirty-four, of Honolulu, Hawaii, was sitting in a large tent at the Quang Tri forward combat base near the DMZ in South Vietnam with the crew of his Jolly Green Giant helicopter, awaiting just such a rescue operation.

Taking off within three minutes, Cowell spiraled the helicopter straight up at seventy miles per hour to gain altitude so as not to fly low over the surrounding rice paddies, where enemy snipers might be lying in wait. During their two-minute upward spiral, Cowell had turned to the heading given by Crown, so as soon as they were going forward they were on their way to southern Laos.

The helicopter was soon met by two Spads from Gene Deatrick's squadron. Knowing that the planes were on a coastal reconnaissance just north of the DMZ, Deatrick had radioed the pilots and arranged for them to escort the helicopter.

Cowell, who had been flying helicopter rescue missions into North Vietnam and Laos for ten months, liked to look out and see Spads. They were the one combat plane that could fly about as slow as a Jolly Green. Always heavily armed and ready to mix it up, Spads "put the fear of God" into anyone on the ground wanting to harm a helicopter, which was most vulnerable when hovering during a rescue pickup.

When Deatrick saw the Jolly Green Giant approaching, he radioed that he would take Cowell to the man in the river. Following Deatrick on a low-level pass, Cowell spotted the man on a flat rock with an SOS next to him. At least he was in the open; pickups through dense jungle were trickier, involving lowering a jungle penetrator on a 250-foot cable through the canopy of vegetation. Too, the helicopter had not drawn any ground fire on the first pass. Cowell went upriver a few hundred feet and dropped his two external fuel tanks, making the helicopter lighter and easier to maneuver. Then he came back over the man in the river, setting up a hover 200 feet overhead. The hoist operator lowered the penetrator,

which had three metal paddles that folded up. When lowered, the paddles deployed three prongs for seats, complete with a safety belt for what was usually a rough ride up to a hovering helicopter whose whirling blades caused a powerful downdraft.

Some sixty seconds passed. Then: "We've got him!" With that, Cowell pushed the helicopter's nose forward, adjusted the throttle, and climbed out over the river.

In the back of the helicopter, Airman First Class Mike Leonard, twenty-one, of Lawler, Iowa, had reached out and pulled the man into the cabin. Leonard, a husky pararescueman, immediately searched under the filthy man's tattered clothing for any weapons or explosives, and found none.

Leonard could not make out much of what the man was saying—he had an accent and was "a little excited." The guy "went to pieces," grabbing hold of one of Leonard's legs and crying, "Oh my God, I'm alive!"

When he started to shake violently and show symptoms of shock—clammy skin and shallow breathing—he was wrapped in a blanket. Although clearly weak and woozy, the man would not let go of Leonard's leg.

Cowell was heading back to their forward base when his engineer came forward and said the man in back was in "pretty bad shape." He recommended going to Da Nang, which, unlike the forward base, had a fully equipped hospital. Cowell radioed Crown, passing along the report of his passenger's condition and asking to proceed 150 miles south to Da Nang. His request was denied. He was told to return to his forward base, and that his passenger would have to wait for medical evacuation to a hospital.

A few minutes later, the engineer was back with a note printed on a piece of paper torn from a flight log. "This is our guy," he hollered over the noise of the whirling rotor blades. "Shot down in February. Been a POW since."

Cowell immediately radioed the identity of their passenger to Crown, who cleared him to proceed directly to Da Nang.

As soon as Cowell found out he was carrying a *Ranger* Spad pilot who went down in February over Laos, it "all clicked together." Cowell had piloted the helicopter that had hovered over Dieter's wreckage

the day after his crash. It had been his crewman who was lowered to the ground to search the scene. That mission Cowell had flown from the Royal Thai Air Force Base at Udorn, where he had been stationed before being assigned to start up a new rescue helicopter unit south of the DMZ.

Now, six months later, he was bringing out of the Laotian jungle—nearly 100 miles from that crash site—*Ranger*'s missing Spad pilot.

Editor's note: The German-born US naval aviator Dieter Dengler was the sole survivor of the seven POWs that escaped the Pathet Lao prison camp in June 1966. He was subsequently awarded the Navy Cross for heroism and in the 1970s worked for Transworld Airlines and later as a civilian test pilot. Along with Hero Found *by Bruce Henderson, who served with Dengler aboard the USS* Ranger*, Dengler's escape ordeal has been the subject of several books and films, including the motion picture* Rescue Dawn. *Sadly, Dieter Dengler later contracted the incurable disease ALS and died by suicide in 2001.*

Chapter Four

Prisoner of the U-90

Edouard Isaacs

The morning of May 31, 1918, broke clear and cool. We had left the coast of France behind and were running west with a fair breeze in company with three other transports. The USS *President Lincoln* was making twelve and a half knots, although had she been alone standard speed would have been her maximum of fifteen knots. The escorting destroyers had left us the preceding evening twenty-four hours out from Brest.

A few hours later, as we were running with all lights out and zig-zagging according to plan, the German submarine *U-90* cruising on the surface at six knots speed sighted us by the light of the moon. All night she trailed us until her captain was sure of our base course. Then, circling around, he made a wide detour and took up his position intercepting our course and a few miles ahead. When we bore in sight he submerged and approached to the attack.

We were finishing breakfast. Two bells had just struck. Suddenly the ship was rocked by a double explosion, the second following the first with scarcely a perceptible interval between. We instantly rushed to our battle stations, and that was the last I saw of any of the heads of departments, for my station was aft alone, theirs were forward. As I ran aft another explosion shook the ship. The first two had been forward, but this one was aft directly in my path. The force of the explosion crushed the No. 12 lifeboat and threw it up on deck not ten feet from where I stood, but only showered me with water.

At ten minutes past nine I received the report that holds No. 5 and No. 6 were flooded and the water approaching No. 1 deck. I reported this over the telephone to the captain, who ordered me to abandon ship.

For fifteen minutes after the *Lincoln* went down, we busied ourselves tying together rafts and boats in order that they would not be scattered over the ocean and so that the survivors could be easily and quickly picked up by the rescuing vessels when they should arrive on the scene. Debris of all kinds was floating about— immense timbers, broken topmasts, and other gear were being propelled out of the water in all directions.

About this time, the other three ships having disappeared in the distance, the submarine came to the surface and approached the boat. In answer to the entreaties of the men in my boat I lay back in the stern sheets and covered the gold stripes on my sleeves with my body. I could not bring myself to the humiliation of hiding in the bottom of the boat and leaving them to face alone the displeasure of the pirates, although they begged me to do so or at least to remove my uniform. I saw later, however, that there was no use in trying to deceive the captain, for the submarine approached to within fifty yards and he could at that short distance readily distinguish every detail of uniform. I had lost my cap, but had on an old blouse under my lifejacket. Recognizing this, the commanding officer of the U-boat put a megaphone to his lips and sang out, "Come aboard."

As I walked along the deck a German sailor came behind me and took my pistol. I then gave him the whole belt. Going up to the conning tower I saluted the officer whom I took to be the captain. He addressed me in rather fair English as follows:

"Are you the captain of the *President Lincoln*?"

"No, sir," I replied. "I believe the captain went down with the ship, for I have not seen him since. I am the first lieutenant."

"I am Captain Remy," he said. "My orders are to take the senior officer prisoner whenever I sink a man-o'-war. You will remain aboard and point out your captain to me."

At that time Captain Foote, of the *Lincoln*, was pulling stroke oar in one of the lifeboats. It was his duty to remain with his men and so be in a position to look after their safety until aided by rescuing vessels. The manner in which he performed this duty is one of the most striking incidents

of the Great War. Of the seven hundred souls aboard the *President Lincoln* only twenty-three men and three officers were lost, and that a greater loss of life did not result must be attributed to the grand discipline which prevailed, for which he alone was responsible, and to his coolness and skill in the long trying hours which elapsed before destroyers arrived at eleven o'clock that night.

When Captain Remy finished speaking he offered me a glass of sherry, which I took with thanks, for the water had been rather cold and I was numb from my waist down. We then cruised slowly among the boats and rafts. I sang out to two or three boats and asked if they had seen the captain. Receiving negative replies I turned to Captain Remy and told him I was sure my captain had gone down with the ship. Thereupon he sent me below and gave me warm clothing.

The submarine then left the scene of the sinking and cruised up and down on the surface for the next two days. Early the following morning a radio message from an American destroyer was intercepted and Captain Remy gave it to me to read. It said: "*President Lincoln* sunk. Survivors saved. A few missing."

Captain Remy treated me with extreme consideration and politeness. He tried to make things as pleasant for me as possible and his officers took their cue from him. I messed with them at their little table and took part in the conversation which, for my sake, was often in English—for nearly all the officers could speak English fairly well, being required to study it at the Naval Academy.

The prison camp was situated on the western outskirts of Villingen. There were no houses of any kind near it, except the caserne of the Villingen battalion, which was across the street. It was filled at the time of my arrival with about five hundred seventeen-year-old youths, and every day and night they were engaged in drill and target practice. Many times at 1 and 2 a.m. we were awakened by the singing as they marched down the road to or from the practice trenches a mile or so away.

"Sing!" would shout the drill sergeants as they whacked one lad here and another there with the flat of their swords. And all would burst out

with *Die Wacht am Rhein* or some other patriotic German air. One day in August away marched the ersatz battalion as the Villingen newspaper, the *Schwarzwalder*, called it. They were escorted to the train by a band; and the townsfolk gathered to throw flowers in their path and to bid them goodbye.

We had often seen youngsters marching past the camp on their way to the station; and, attracted by their singing, the Frenchmen and I would mount tables and peer over the high board fence that obstructed our view of everything outside.

"Ah," the Frenchmen would say, "they sing to forget their hunger!"

Before we entered the war, the prisoners at Villingen included Russian, French, and British officers; but at the time of my arrival there were only Russians and Americans—about one hundred and fifty of the former and forty of the latter. The Russians, many of whom had been there since 1914, were terribly emaciated. Even then they were as a class of larger stature than the officers of any other nationality. Most of them were excellent men, well educated, and represented the best Russia could produce; but there were a few Bolsheviki among them. Since the defection of Russia, the fall of the monarchy, and the rise of the Bolsheviki, parcels from home had ceased coming, and the prisoners were forced to depend almost entirely on the ration from the Germans.

The Americans used to share their food with the Russians, but at times the supply ran very low. There were weeks when no parcels from the Red Cross would get through, perhaps owing to transportation troubles, and then several parcels for each officer would come together. Often the boxes were plundered; but enough food came through to make us independent of the German ration.

Some aviators had just come in from the castle prison at Landshut. They told of several attempts to escape from the castle and also from the train on the way down. The German commandant at Landshut had their shoes taken from them every night; and when an attempt to escape proved unsuccessful he would punish them with two or three weeks of solitary confinement in a cell until whatever sentence was awarded by the Bavarian Government should arrive. This was usually eight days' solitary confinement; and although they would already have served double their sentence he would keep them in the cell eight days more.

On one occasion he placed two aviators in solitary confinement on the mere suspicion that they were going to try to escape. Such procedure was unheard of. The two Americans threatened dire things and finally wrote the Danish, the Dutch, and the Spanish Embassies demanding that steps be taken to procure their release. When the commandant saw these letters he was thoroughly bluffed, and released them immediately after a stay of nine days in the cell.

On October 5th we heard that two days later all the Russians at Villingen were to be shifted to other camps in the north of Germany. With the Russians out of the way, a perfect watch could be kept on us at all times; and our hiding-places for contraband would be reduced to the few nooks in our barracks and to holes in the ground. Besides, the day after their departure, we should have a search so thorough as to make it practically impossible to save any of our escape material. As it was the dark of the moon, conditions seemed to favor our making one last effort to get away before the Russians left.

The night of October 5th one of the aviators and I, having collected and sharpened most of the pocket-knives in the camp, made our way to a shed behind the mess hall and attempted to cut through it. Before we had proceeded far, however, we realized that it could not be done in one night; and the cutting would surely be noticed the following day, even though we were so fortunate as not to be seen, while working, by the inside guards. So, abandoning that plan, we crawled unobserved to the tennis court; and then, picking up the long markers, we straightened up and walked boldly to my barrack as if it were the most natural thing in the world. We were not noticed. Once inside, the markers were laid on the floor lengthwise under several of the beds; and as it was then nearly eleven o'clock and Taps, we waited until the morrow to complete our plans.

Sunday, October 6th, the day before the Russians were to leave, I called a meeting in my barrack of all those Americans whom I knew to be interested in a plan of escape. After stating my reasons for doing so, I insisted that we go that night. Everyone agreed, and we debated on the best plans to adopt.

By this time we had several pairs of wirecutters and other tools, so we decided to get out of our barracks or through the inside fence at different

parts of the camp, and then cut through or go over the outer fence. This would confuse the sentries, and the first ones out would draw their fire and thus give the others a better chance to cut through. The lights were to be short-circuited and a diversion was to be created in a different part of the yard by a few Russian officers whom we could trust.

I chose to build a bridge with the tennis court markers, cut the grating in my window, and when the lights went out, launch the bridge through the window to the outer fence and crawl over. Two of the aviators, Lieutenant Battle and Lieutenant Tucker, cast in their lot with me. The second team, consisting of three infantrymen and one aviator, proposed to cut the grating in a window of the next barrack, climb over the ditch with its little fence, and then cut through the outer wire by using the wire cutters. A third team, consisting of two aviators, decided to adopt the same plan as the second team; except that instead of cutting through the outer fence they were to build a ladder of bed-slats, carry it out through the window, and then by means of it climb over the high wire. Willis and three other aviators planned to disguise themselves as German soldiers, cut through a plain wire fence that surrounded the guard-house, and then, when the guard off duty should rush out the main gate in answer to the firing at us, to mingle with them and go out at the same time.

All afternoon my two comrades and I cut, filed, and bent the iron grating in the lower half of my window while the guards were at the far end of their beats. By dark we had every wire parted except one half-inch iron rod which ran from top to bottom in the center of the window. This was too thick to file in that short space of time, so, as it was embedded in wood at the bottom, we decided to leave it until the lights went out; and then one of us, by putting all his strength against it, could wrench it out and bend it up out of the way. Although the wires were parted, we left the ends as near together as possible, in order not to make the cutting visible to the guards on the outside.

Roll-call was at 7 p.m. and by that time it was completely dark. Immediately afterwards we commenced work on the bridge. Watchers were posted at the windows and door of the barrack while we worked behind a row of lockers. The battens were turned on their sides. Tops of Red Cross food boxes, taken from their hiding-place in the woodpile,

were screwed to the battens with the screws collected some time before. We worked quietly and rapidly and although our hands were badly blistered by the screw-drivers, we had the bridge completed by ten o'clock. It was about fifteen inches wide and looked fairly solid. It should have been, for the screws were from two to four inches long, and we had to screw them all the way in, or otherwise our clothes might catch on them as we crawled over. I had laid in a stock of shoe-blacking, and with this and my toothbrush we blackened the bridge so that it would not appear light in the darkness. Two stools were placed under the ends of the bridge and we then tested it. It sagged badly in the middle and would hardly hold my weight—and one of the aviators was heavier than I. But the distance from the window-ledge to the outer fence was only fifteen feet and the bridge was eighteen feet long, so that would leave three feet inside when it was in place. By putting sufficient weight on the inside end, our weight in the center of the bridge, as we crawled over, would be balanced at least in part. We then drew lots to see the order in which we were to go over, and Tucker, the smallest of the three, drew first place; I came next; and Battle, the heaviest man, came last. This was very fortunate, for if the bridge broke under my weight or with the heaviest man, one at least would get out.

When all was in readiness we stripped off our clothing, greased our bodies with lard saved for several weeks, and then put on whatever clothes we had that looked at all like civilian dress. In one pocket of my coat I put my maps; in another, my compass and pepper; and in the other two, a few French biscuits, some sausage, and some sweet chocolate. Unfortunately I lost most of the food out of my pocket while running a few minutes later.

The other teams were busy making their preparations, but by half-past ten all were ready. We brought out the wire chains and gave them to four of the officers who were to throw them over the lighting wires in different parts of the yard. They took up their position casually and waited for the signal. This was to be given by another officer, who, standing under a large electric light in the center of the camp, would bend his body three times as soon after ten-thirty as the position of the inside sentries warranted. It was hoped that all of those who aided us would be able to get back to their barracks unobserved after the show was over.

At ten-thirty the lights inside the barracks were turned out as usual. Our bridge was then brought near the window and two officers who were to aid us took their stations at either side of it preparatory to launching it through the window. The bridge weighed only about fifty pounds, but was so long as to be unwieldy, so we greased the under-side of the battens in order to have it slide out over the window ledge with a minimum of friction and noise.

At ten-forty-five the camp was suddenly plunged in darkness to the accompaniment of rattling chains. I jumped to the window, grasped the iron rod, and tore it from its wooden socket. It came with a crash carrying with it the severed grating. It took but a second to bend it up out of the way, but as I did so the lights came on again. Our helpers had the bridge almost to the ledge, but I pushed it down in time to avoid its being seen by the sentries, who, astonished by the strange happenings, were standing in their tracks openmouthed with wonder. They had heard noises, but had seen nothing except the sudden darkness.

The lights had no sooner come on than out they went again, and this continued for perhaps ten seconds that seemed instead like hours. I understood at once what had happened. One of the circuits had the positive and negative wires directly over each other; and the chain, after being thrown over the top wire, swung back and forth, only occasionally touching the lower wire. I knew it would take only a few seconds to heat up the fuse before it would blow, but this delay almost upset our plans. The sentries were too stupid, however, to guess what was taking place.

As we crouched there, waiting, I could hear a perfect din in the far corner of the yard: it was the demonstration being made by our Russian friends. It undoubtedly drew many sentries, but those outside our window seemed too stupefied to move.

Finally the lights went off and stayed off; and then we worked swiftly. The bridge was shot through the window and landed in perfect position on the outer fence, making a resounding twang as it struck. Tucker crawled on the bridge and made his way carefully across, while the guards, who by this time had begun to realize what was happening, called out, Halt! Halt! several times in rapid succession. I followed him, as the two helpers put their weight on the inside end, and thus raised up the center

of the span. I must have flown across, for when I arrived at the end over the fence Tucker was just dropping down. I dropped down beside him as the guards shouted Halt! for the last time and prepared to fire.

When we dropped to the ground we whirled and ran away from the camp and past the guards who had approached to within a few feet on either side of the end of the bridge. As we did so, both guards fired; and the one on my right had the end of his rifle so close to my head that the flash seemed to singe my hair. But neither of us was hit; so, running bent double and zigzagging, we continued away from the camp. Then I heard Battle jump from the bridge to the ground; and calling out, "Follow me," I headed for the top of the slope three hundred yards away.

The first shots were the signal for a volley from the guards all along that side of the fence; and during the next few minutes there was a regular hail of bullets sprinkling the side of the hill. But as we were mere shadows only a little blacker than the darkness and moving swiftly, we soon were completely blended with the surrounding obscurity.

About two miles south of the camp was a landmark called the Hun's Grave. Tradition says that when Attila and his Huns overran Europe one of the barbarian's leaders died on this spot and was immediately interred. It was this landmark that Willis and I chose for a rendezvous, and toward it I ran until too tired to do more than walk. But a few minutes after leaving the camp I reached the grave, and then sat down in a clump of bushes and waited, calling out guardedly my own name at frequent intervals—for this was the signal agreed upon.

Tucker and Battle had passed me in the darkness keeping on toward a rendezvous of their own, and I had no way of knowing if Willis had escaped. I did hear a few scattered shots, however, when I was about a mile from camp; but that meant nothing to me, for I was very much accustomed to that sound just then. Apparently none of the other teams had broken through—at least I saw no sign of them and all the firing seemed to be directed at our team.

I must have waited fully five minutes at the rendezvous and still no sign of Willis. So, calling my name two or three times and receiving no

answer, I decided to press on in the direction in which we had planned. I could wait no longer, for even now the battalion, three hundred strong, might be on my trail and their hounds would lead them unerringly. I had crossed a field and was skirting a woods when I heard a slight sound behind me. I stopped to listen, but heard nothing more. It was probably the patter of raindrops on the fallen leaves, for it had just begun to mist. No time could be lost, so I continued on. I had not gone far when again that rustling sound was heard. This time I waited several seconds; and sure enough, someone was following me, for there was the unmistakable sound of swishing clothes. I stepped noiselessly into the brush and waited for my pursuer to pass. Soon he came along, and I could see his dark form only a few feet from me. He was wearing a raincoat, and that is what caused the noise I heard. The thought at once came to me that a guard on my trail would hardly be wearing a raincoat; so I called out my name in a very low tone of voice. The figure stopped and quickly sidestepped into the bushes a few yards ahead of me; but no answer came. After waiting some moments I again called out, this time distinctly. "Willis!" came back a shout of joy. I was never before so elated over meeting a fellow human being.

Together we continued the march. Over hills, through rivers, and into swamps, heading a little west of south, with one eye on the compass, the other on the ground, we tramped until daylight. At times we were in water up to our shoulders; and even when on dry ground the going was difficult, for our shoes were filled with water and our clothes so wet they restricted the movement of our legs. Occasionally in the darkness we would step into holes or suddenly feel the ground drop from under us as a bank or low precipice came in our path. We had many bad falls, but had to keep going, as distance that first night was vital. When it looked feasible we would stop, cover our trail with pepper, then double back, and jump as far as possible off to one side to throw the dogs off the scent. They will not take the trail after once sniffing pepper, and it is then necessary to put another dog on the trail where the first one left it. This delays the pursuers considerably, and accounts for the fact that pepper was considered contraband by the Germans and denied to all prisoners. They always removed the pepper from our Red Cross boxes, but we were able to steal some in spite of all their precautions.

In crossing rivers we would walk a considerable distance up the bed of the stream and try to step on rocks when coming out of the water on the opposite side. A hard surface like stone or iron will not retain a scent for any great length of time; whereas it will hang around damp grass indefinitely.

Often we were startled by sentinel-like trees standing alone in the fields: in the gloom they so closely resembled the guards, who we knew were by this time searching for us. We never walked in the roads, but always in the forest or through the fields; never crossed bridges, but always swam or forded the rivers; and never made the slightest noise it was possible to avoid. When we spoke, which was seldom, it was always in whispers; and we never coughed from the moment we left the camp until we were safely in Switzerland.

We had planned to cross from the headwaters of the Danube, through the mountains and the heart of the Black Forest, or Schwarzwald, in a southwesterly direction to the Rhine, which in that part of the country forms the boundary between Germany and Switzerland. Villingen was situated on the Brigach River, which, a few miles to the south, unites with the Brege to form the Danube. We expected to swim the Rhine at a point forty miles in a straight line from Villingen and knew that meant a march of about one hundred and twenty miles. We proposed to do it in six days. Had we wished, we could have marched straight to the south and met the Swiss border at the Schaffhausen salient, only eighteen miles from Villingen; or we could have continued southward to the east of Waldshut, where the Rhine is a much smaller stream, and where we should have had easy going all the way. But by adopting either of those two plans we should have been following the beaten trail—the way that most prisoners had gone and where most had been recaptured.

For the Schaffhausen salient is north of the Rhine and the frontier there has no natural barrier; so the Germans had stationed three lines of sentries on their side of the border, spaced so closely as to make it almost impossible to break through. Besides, all the country to the south of Villingen and to the east of Waldshut was patrolled by sentries—especially the roads leading south and the bridges over the rivers. To the west of Waldshut the Rhine doubles in size, owing to the addition of the Aare

River, which drains the northern half of Switzerland and which flows into the Rhine near that town. Also, the country to the west is very rough; and few prisoners attempt those mountains. For these reasons we chose the hard but sure way.

About 6 a.m. the morning after we escaped, we climbed down a rocky cliff, skirted the village of Unterbrand, and there in the edge of the forest found a thicket and prepared to camp for the day. We had walked about twenty-five miles and had put twelve good miles between us and the camp; so we rested secure in our hiding-place. We took turns at sleeping, and each of us managed to get perhaps two hours of sleep. The sun reached us for a short time and partly dried our clothes; so we were almost comfortable.

Suddenly about 1 p.m. we heard the distant baying of hounds, and for the next hour we were in mortal dread of discovery. The baying grew louder and louder; and finally we could tell there were several hounds that apparently had followed our trail and were approaching the village we had skirted early that morning. They kept coming closer until it seemed only the village separated us; but at last they must have received a setback, for they came no nearer and seemed to be running up and down uttering baffled whines. We conjectured that they had lost the trail where we climbed down the cliff. The sounds of the pursuit then became less audible and soon were lost to us entirely. From that time on we had no further experience with hounds.

There were numerous children playing in the forest, however, and on many occasions they almost ran us down. The Schwarzwald is rather thickly populated when one considers the very small area of soil that is tillable. Every few miles there is a village consisting of twenty or thirty houses; and small farms surround the homes. These villages are mere clearings in the pine forest; and as there are no lone houses scattered throughout the country the cover is excellent, and it is easy to avoid meeting people. Of course at times we would run upon towns in the darkness and would have some difficulty in getting out unobserved. But we were very fortunate.

One night about eleven o'clock, while walking along the edge of a road in a driving rain, we passed a man walking in the opposite direction.

He was just as anxious to avoid us as we were him, so both parties kept on going.

The food we had was so very little that it was necessary to look for some in the fields. We had no trouble in finding cabbage, potatoes, turnips, and other vegetables which, in the raw state, formed our chief articles of diet during that week.

Early the fourth night we came to the Alb River, a tributary of the Rhine, the west bank of which we proposed to follow down to where it flowed into the Rhine. We were below St. Blasien, a famous summer resort, and tried to cross there, but were on the heights probably two hundred feet above the river and had no way of getting down. We finally decided to pick our way down the side of the cliff; and, although it was slow work and somewhat nerve-racking, we were successful. In looking up from the bottom after it was all over, it seemed impossible that we had been able to cling to that vertical wall of rock and to lower ourselves down.

We followed the stream after crossing it, but soon came to logging camps, summer hotels, electric power plants, and breweries, all built between the west bank of the river and the high cliffs. After walking over front porches, under driveways, and through barns, we decided that that was too risky, so we scaled the cliffs; and then, leaving the river behind, we made our way through the mountains.

It was very difficult walking. We would sometimes be lost for hours in a gorge and could not find our way out. Instead of going south we would at times find ourselves heading north, because the mountains were passable only at certain places, and we would walk in circles trying to find the passes. Every few hundred yards was a mountain torrent and every torrent meant a difficult gorge or ravine. The cold was intense, and especially was this true of the daytime when we would lie in each other's arms trying to keep warm. We would cut down great quantities of spruce limbs and make beds for ourselves, but the cold would find its way in just the same.

One morning, after an exceptionally hard night, we had fallen where we stood and were both in a heavy sleep. Suddenly I was awakened by a voice. I sat up and to my horror found that Willis was delirious. He was babbling incoherently and seemed to have a high fever. I soothed him as well as I could, and in a few hours he was almost normal. In that week,

however, I watched his hair turn almost white. Had we not been in excellent health, neither of us would ever have survived that terrible trip with its dramatic ending.

Our maps showed us that the only railroad we should meet after the second night was a line that paralleled the Rhine and was only a short distance from it. Few trains in Germany were allowed to run (during the war) between the hours of 11 p.m. and sunrise; so we feared we might come upon the track in the darkness without having heard any movement of trains. The railroad embankment seemed a likely place for a line of sentries, so it was necessary that we approach it with caution.

About daybreak the morning of the sixth day, just as we were looking for a place to hide, the whistle of a locomotive was heard; so we decided to keep on until we were in a position where we could observe the railroad track and the bank of the river, and, if possible, the lines of sentries patrolling both. In this way we hoped to discover the number of the sentries, their positions and beats, and the hours the watch was changed; for this information would aid us in trying to elude them.

Accordingly, although it was daylight, we kept on past some farms in which the women were already working. We crawled along, obtaining cover where possible, but the forest had thinned considerably in the last mile or two, and soon ceased altogether. We took up our position in the brush which extended farthest to the south and therefore nearest to our objective, and awaited developments.

It was about 8 a.m. and a thin veil of fog hung over the country in front of us, but by nine o'clock it had lifted and revealed our position to us. We were on the edge of a large clearing which apparently extended to the Rhine about a mile away. We could not see the river, for the country was rolling and sloped rather sharply to the south, but occasionally we would hear a passing train and see the smoke rise from a hollow, which we took to be the cut of the railway line.

A little to the left of us, and occupying most of the space between our hiding place and the river, lay the little town of Hauenstein. All day long pedestrians passed our clump of bushes within two feet of us as we sat behind some brush and peered through trying to see the sentries. We were unsuccessful, owing to the nature of the terrain, but we laid our plans

for the evening from what little information we did obtain, and then prepared for sleep.

Perhaps all week long we had slept a total of not more than ten or twelve hours and were badly in need of a little rest, before undertaking the hard work ahead of us. Willis lay down first while I sat beside him and watched. Only a few minutes later one of the passersby, instead of following the path outside the brush, broke through and walked past us at a distance of about ten feet. He looked directly at me, but continued on into the woods. I noticed that he had a sack in his hands and was probably picking beech nuts, for we had seen several children doing the same thing the past few days. I wondered why he did not immediately give the alarm, but happened to think of the cap I was wearing and then understood. I had the cap Willis had worn the night of the escape; and as it looked very much like a German soldier's cap, it probably deceived the man who had just seen it. Only the upper part of my body was visible to him, and Willis was behind me; so I was sure he was not suspicious. We took no chances, however, but crawled away into a denser part of the forest and lay there until dark.

About seven o'clock that evening we removed our clothing, greased our bodies with lard, and then dressed for the last stage of our journey. We donned short tights and jerseys and securely fastened them to our bodies. Then we pulled on trousers and stockings which we rubbed in mud to darken them, and over our shoulders we loosely hung our khaki shirts. Coats, hats, and shoes were discarded, our hands and faces covered with black dirt, and at eight o'clock we left our hiding place; crawling noiselessly on our hands and knees we cautiously traversed the fields between us and the Rhine. The village of Hauenstein was passed on our left; and great care was taken in crossing the roads leading into the town. When we reached the railroad we listened for the tramp of sentries, but finding everything quiet, crossed the tracks with little noise and continued on.

About fifty yards from the railway we came to the edge of a cliff and lay there listening. From below came the sound of lapping water and the steady, measured tread of a sentry walking his beat. But we could find no way of getting down. We crept slowly along the edge of the cliff, stopping every few feet to listen, and trying to find a place where it was passable.

Willis would lower me down the side as far as his arms would reach, and I would try to dig my toes into a crevice or any place they could penetrate.

After traversing nearly two miles, and passing twice through the edge of the village, we were no nearer the river than when we first reached the cliff. We found several places where paths or trails and even roads led down to the Rhine, but these places were so closely guarded by sentries that it would have been folly to attempt to get past. A heavy fog was depositing its moisture on us and on the grass through which we crawled, and we were wet to the skin, but the impenetrable gloom prevented our being seen, so was a decided advantage.

After three hours of vain attempts to negotiate the cliff, we decided to make a detour and try to intercept a mountain stream we had seen that morning, and follow it down to its mouth. All the mountain torrents—and there are many in this vicinity—flow into the Rhine with a tremendous force and the noise of rushing water. We felt that we could do better in the bed of the stream where any sound we might make would hardly be heard above the roar of the falls; so when we came to the creek we bent to our knees and made our way down its center. In places the water was up to our waists; at others only a few inches covered the rock-strewn bed. On our hands and knees, trying to keep only our heads above water, we slowly made our way along, carefully testing each stone before we ventured to put our weight on it.

Midnight had struck—all the village church-bells in Germany strike the hours—and there were no lights anywhere. We had only a half-mile to go, but it took nearly two hours to accomplish it. Our hands and knees and the soles of our feet were cut by the sharp rocks; and the water felt like ice to our badly nourished bodies. Besides the physical torture, the mental strain we were under was terrible. Every instant we were in the gravest danger of discovery; we knew that sentries were but a few yards away and a single misstep would mean capture.

Once, when passing under a viaduct patrolled by sentries, one of us must have made a noise sufficiently loud to be heard above. Instantly a searchlight was thrown on the creek and a minute inspection took place. We stood still with only our heads above water. These covered with mud were of the same color as the surrounding rocks, and the guards were

too far away to tell the difference. At intervals the searchlight was again flashed, but between the flashes we were able to pass through the danger zone unseen.

Finally we came to the mouth of the torrent, where, with a splashing and roaring, the waters of the creek threw themselves into the Rhine. My watch showed a few minutes before two. A cold wind had sprung up and was driving the fog before it down the river. This was an advantage; for, with complete darkness, there was some danger of being turned around and swimming back to the German shore. With the fog lifted we could at least see the direction in which we wished to go.

We did not know how wide the Rhine was at this point, but thought perhaps one hundred yards. As we learned later from the Swiss guards it measures seven hundred feet across, has a current of seven miles an hour, and is filled with whirlpools caused by the numerous mountain streams which hurl themselves into the river from the hills and mountains on either side.

As we crouched in the water a few feet from the bank we debated in whispers how we were to swim and when we should remove our clothes. I asked Willis a question and he did not answer. When I turned to look for him he was nowhere to be seen. Without a word of warning he had disappeared from where he stood within a foot of me as if the earth had opened up and swallowed him. It was terrifying, but I busied myself in getting off my outer clothing. I was just pulling off my trousers when I must have stepped a few inches farther out into the stream. With a powerful blow the current struck me and I was swept away toward the center of the river. I swam the breaststroke, in order not to be heard by the sentries along the shore, and headed across. It was easy work and I made rapid progress until the center of the stream was reached. Then the fight began.

I seemed to be borne along with terrific speed, and although I used different strokes, none seemed to gain me anything over that powerful current. The water was very cold and the exposure during the preceding six hours had sapped most of my strength. I kept fighting until I thought I could go no farther. Down the river in the distance I could see a high point of land extending out into the stream. This made it appear to me that the Rhine at that point must bend toward the south; and if that were

true, I knew I had to reach the shore before the point was reached and before the waters, sliding off the Swiss bank at a tangent, should carry me with them back toward the center again.

Mustering all my strength I made a final effort and succeeded in passing through the worst part of the center. But the exertion took the last of my strength; and although the shore loomed up less than thirty yards away, I could go no farther. So turning over on my back I commended my soul to my God and closed my eyes. Instantly my feet touched the rocks.

For a few minutes I lay there gasping for breath and trying to find words for a proper thanksgiving; then, after making four or five unsuccessful attempts to rise, I dragged myself up the sloping shore to a railroad embankment a few feet above.

There, standing in my bare feet on the sharp rocks of the railroad bed in a howling wind, I took off my tights and jersey, wrung out the water, and replaced them. It was 2:30 a.m. on Sunday, October 13, 1918, the seventh day after my escape from Villingen, and I was free at last; so what mattered a few sharp rocks cutting into my wounded feet?

I knew that when once I placed foot on Swiss soil my troubles were at an end and I had nothing more to fear. A prisoner escaping to a neutral country has no military or naval status, but is simply a citizen of the country from which he originally comes—his native land. So by giving himself up to the police, he runs no risk of internment, unless he cannot prove his right to asylum or has no passport.

When I had regained sufficient strength I walked up the railroad track to a road, which I followed a short distance until I came to a house. After knocking and assuring the occupants that I was only an escaped American prisoner, I was taken in and treated with the utmost kindness. The owner of the house, a Swiss customs guard, at my request went out to search for Willis, and found him in a small tavern about two miles down the river where he had just applied for admittance. It seems that the current had swept him off his feet before he had removed all his clothes, and of course he could not cry out to warn me because of the nearness of the sentries. He, too, had fought a terrible battle to get across.

As neither Willis nor I had passports, we were taken by Swiss gendarmes to Bern, the capital, and turned over to the American Embassy, where we were provided with the necessary papers. There we found that only one other officer of the thirteen who had been in the escape had succeeded in reaching safety: he was Lieutenant Puryear, of the third team. The others who had managed to get outside the camp were probably recaptured. One American soldier also escaped to Switzerland about this time, and we four were the first ones of the American forces to escape from Germany up to the 15th of October.

In possession of our passports we had no trouble in leaving the country. At Paris I left the others and proceeded alone to London, where I reported to Vice-Admiral Sims, commander of the American Naval Forces in Europe.

The day after my report was submitted, it was learned that the German submarines were returning to their home ports under the white flag. I was too late!

Editor's note: Edouard Isaacs was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his daring escape and in 1937 was elected to the United States House of Representatives.

Chapter Five

The Great Desert Escape from Papago Park

Keith Warren Lloyd

Just after seven o'clock on the evening of December 23, 1944, the wheezing strains of an accordion echoed across the Papago Buttes, followed by a rousing chorus of Germanic male voices. Searchlights from the nearby guard towers swept across the darkened landscape to converge on Compound 1B, revealing a large formation of prisoners standing along the fence that divided their enclosure from Compound 2. The enlisted sailors of that stockade had fully turned out as well and were also singing heartily. In their front rank, one of the Germans was brazenly waving a large handmade Nazi flag.

Deutschland, Deutschland über alles,
Über alles in der Welt!
Wenn es stets zu Schutz und Trutze
Brüderlich zusammenhält!
Von der Maas bis an die Memel,
Von der Etsch bis an den Belt!
Deutschland, Deutschland über alles,
Über alles in der Welt!

The guard house and officer of the day were alerted. When an intensely annoyed Lieutenant Frank arrived, he instructed the sergeant of the guard to gather as many men as possible and to bring CN grenades, which when activated dispersed the highly irritating riot control agent

chloroacetophenone. Frank then entered Compound 2, where the prisoner who usually served as spokesman pretended that he did not understand English. By that time the prisoners had finished with the German national anthem and were singing the robust marching songs of the *Kriegsmarine*.

Heimat, so weit von hier,
Heimat, dich grüßen wir
Für dich, da fahren wir
den lauernden Tod im Torpedorohr,
ran an den Feind! U-Boote vor!

"I then said, during a lull in the singing, quite loudly, that I knew there were individuals in the group who understood English and unless the disturbances ceased immediately I would be forced to take other measures to halt it," Frank later reported. He then entered Compound 1B and repeated his statement. "The rejoinder was hoots of derision and laughter and a clowning pantomime by almost all to indicate that no one understood English, which I knew to be untrue."

As if to corroborate Frank's future testimony, some wag within the German ranks began leading his fellows in singing *Don't Fence Me In*, which had been performed by Roy Rogers in the recently released film *Hollywood Canteen*. The Cole Porter tune was enjoying a rising popularity, not only on the American music charts but in prisoner of war camps across the country.

Oh give me land, lots of land, and the starry skies above
Don't fence me in
Let me ride through the wide open country that I love
Don't fence me in

Voices began to rise from prisoners in the adjacent compounds. Frank began to fear that the entire camp would soon join in a general rebellion. The sergeant of the guard returned with several armed soldiers and a case of CN hand grenades.

"I stood outside the interior fence of the compound, and in full view removed a grenade from its case," Frank stated. "I pretended to pull the pin and swung my arm back as if intending to throw the grenade."

Whether or not the Germans realized that the American officer was wielding a tear gas grenade or believed that he was about to throw a deadly fragmentary device into their midst, Frank's action had the desired sobering effect. The singing immediately ceased and the demonstration quickly broke up, the prisoners finally repairing to their barracks. One of the camp's German language translators, Corporal Frank Gebhart, was instructed to issue a stern caution to the prisoners: "If such a demonstration recurred, there would be no warning but that it would be broken up immediately by some more stringent means than had already been used."

Once order had been restored, Lieutenant Frank set to work preparing for what he feared would be a long night ahead. He arranged for two guards carrying riot batons to patrol the fence line between Compound 1B and Compound 2, watched over by a third man armed with a Tommy gun. Five vehicles equipped with machine guns were moved from the motor pool to the guard house, ready to transport additional personnel stationed there as a quick reaction force. The guard towers were cautioned to remain especially alert and Lieutenant Frank, along with the sergeant of the guard, made sporadic inspections of the rebellious compounds throughout the night.

"During this entire period to the best of my recollection," Frank would later testify, "Compound 1A remained orderly, and there was no indication that anything unusual was occurring."

Later in the evening the winds began to rise, stirring the leaves of the shade trees in the prisoners' gardens and carrying with it the rich, earthy scent of a desert storm. The light of the winter's moon was blotted out by a bank of rain clouds. Above Papago Park the skies began to grumble and would soon open. The soldiers on night watch would spend the early hours of Christmas Eve 1944 listening to the rain beating steadily on the roofs of their guard towers.

The camp awakened to a sky washed clean by the rainstorm, though more sodden clouds lingered on the horizon. Rivulets had formed in the sandy arroyos coursing down from the buttes and murky water brimmed the ruts formed by jeep tires on the patrol roads. Through this depressing landscape, made even more melancholy by the fact that it was Christmas Eve, the prisoners of war plodded their way to breakfast with a thick paste of gritty mud clinging heavily to the soles of their GI shoes.

To the soldiers of Service Command Unit 1982, the Germans seemed to while away the afternoon hours that followed like any other lazy, rainy Sunday. The defiance and vitriol of the previous evening seemed to have largely subsided. Perhaps the krauts had gotten it out of their system and a pleasant Christmas could be expected after all. Except for a few foreign voices coming together to sing familiar-sounding carols behind the open doorways of their barracks, it was relatively quiet in Papago Park.

A few minutes after four o'clock, acting First Sergeant Eugene Hoya walked briskly through the rain and entered Compound 1A. With him was the translator, Corporal Gebhart, to assist with conducting the evening roll call. One of the first prisoners Hoya and Gebhart encountered was Gerhard Ender, a gaunt and creepy character with thick spectacles who had served as a petty officer aboard the ill-fated blockade runner *Burgenland* and was reputed to be a fervid Nazi with ties to the Gestapo.

Have the prisoners gather in the mess hall for a head count, Gebhart told Ender, so the men would not have to stand out in the rain. Slowly the Germans filed into the building, and Eugene Hoya sighed as he glanced at his roster. There were thirty-nine men present, there should be sixty-two. By half past four o'clock, there were still twelve officers and eleven enlisted personnel who had not come forth to be counted.

Where were the rest of the men? Gebhart asked of Ender. Barely able to suppress a sinister grin, Ender shrugged his bony shoulders and professed his ignorance.

Hoya and Gebhart left the prisoners in the dank mess hall and made their way through the driving rain to the orderly room. The officer in charge of Compound 1A was Lieutenant Watson, who at first could not be located, but Hoya happened to know that the stockade executive officer, Captain Homer Davis, was enjoying a movie at the base theater. Hoya

called the theater and had the captain paged. The miscreants of Compound 1A were at it again, Hoya informed Davis. They were refusing to fall out for roll call, possibly because Hoya and Gebhart were mere corporals and not officers.

Wait for me there, Davis told Hoya. So the boys in 1A were taking their turn to cause trouble over the Christmas holiday, Captain Davis thought, having the switchboard operator connect him with the officer of the day. He instructed that a squad of armed men should meet him outside the gate to Compound 1A.

"As I recall it, it was between 4:45 and 5 o'clock when we went back in the compound with the men of the guard with clubs," Hoya said. "At that time we lined the men up right east of the mess hall."

Rather than a simple head count, a "cross-over" roll call was conducted, where one by one the prisoners were called by name and required to fall out of their ranks, walk past the guards, and fall into a new formation. "It was raining pretty hard and we were watching carefully to see that the right men crossed over with the right name," Hoya stated. "We got the same figures that we had previously, so we went away with the guards and checked every roll call in other compounds for the absent men."

"All hell broke loose in the camp," former petty officer Kurt Krüger recalled. "Everybody had to come out into the open to be counted."

Captain Davis rushed to the nearest telephone and called the Signal Office. Have all available personnel report to the headquarters building immediately, Davis ordered, and locate Colonel Holden. Twenty-five German prisoners of war, twelve officers and thirteen enlisted men, were gone.

The Great Desert Escape from Papago Park commenced at approximately 6:30 p.m. on 23 December 1944, while the American guards were preoccupied with the rowdy demonstrations of the prisoners of war in Compound 1B. Fritz Guggenberger and Jürgen Quaet-Faslem, two of the more enthusiastic conspirators involved in the escape planning, formed the first of ten *fluggruppen,* or "flight groups," to enter the tunnel.

At the lowest point where the tunnel passed beneath the ditch that ran alongside the patrol road, the two *Kapitänleutnants* encountered a

long puddle of muddy water, seepage from the nearby Crosscut Canal. After reaching the vertical shaft at the tunnel's far end they cautiously climbed the escape ladder and removed the camouflaged cover to the exit. Along with a burst of fresh, damp evening air, the men could hear the rambunctious singing of the prisoners in the adjoining compounds. Creeping quietly through the bushes, the two U-boat captains slipped into the Crosscut Canal and began to wade downstream.

One by one the *fluggruppen* departed on schedule. There was the diminutive Kurt Mohrdieck along with his pal Frederich Sternberg and young Artur Karstens. Next came Ferdinand Fuge, Kurt Strehke, and Herbert Fuchs. They were followed by the organizer of the tunnel project, *Kapitänleutnant* Hans-Werner Kraus, and the twenty-one-year old who had served as Kraus' s second watch officer aboard the *U-199*, Helmut Drescher.

On their hands and knees the men crawled through the dim light and foul air, their heavy rucksacks pulled behind them on the wash basin that had been turned into a tunnel cart. Jürgen Schroder, a first officer in the German Merchant Marine, exited the tunnel with Martin Reese from the *U-606*. The "Three Crazy Boatmen," coastal artillery officers Wilhelm Günther, Wolfgang Clarus, and Frederich Utzolino, were the next to depart with their dismantled canoe and high hopes for a successful run down the Gila River.

Hans Zunforf and Otto Hoferichter were followed by a trio of enlisted sailors, Helmut Gugger, Herman Streng, and Karl Frenzel. Next came *Kapitän zur See* Jürgen Wattenberg, who had selected two enlisted men from the lost *U-162* to accompany him, Walter Kozur and Johann Kremer. The last men to leave before August Maus directed the tunnel entrance to be sealed were petty officer Heinrich Palmer and *Fähnrich* Reinhard Mark, who had crawled through the break in the fence from Compound 1B.

"Our surveyors had done such a good job that we came out about 50 centimeters beside the telegraph pole on the dike without being seen," Wattenberg recounted. "Then we crawled down from the dike to the canal, wearing only swim trunks. The water was cool and came up to our waists. We were stooping forward a little and carrying our packs on our backs. Then we crept ahead and very slowly. The group that came before

us could be neither seen nor heard. The sentry on the watch tower couldn't see us behind the angle of the dike. The sentries seemed concerned only with the NCO camp from which came the forbidden folk and battle songs and the breaking of beer bottles. Suddenly floodlights came on but were directed at the NCO camp while our camp was in darkness. So everything was going as planned."

The captain and his companions waded carefully downstream, fearing that a slip on the moss-covered canal bottom would result in a splash that would draw the searchlights of the guard towers. After following the Arizona Crosscut Canal southward for the recommended five hundred meters they crept slowly to the top of the far bank. In the shelter of the creosote bushes, each man changed into his dry traveling clothes before taking a strong pull from a bottle of homemade schnapps. Then Wattenberg, Kozur, and Kremer shouldered their rucksacks and struck off through the drizzling rain for the large citrus orchard off the eastern bank of the canal.

After hiking briskly for several minutes they were deep into the orchard. The three Germans spread their bedrolls beneath the leaves of a grapefruit tree to rest for the remainder of the night. "But that was impossible," Wattenberg would describe. "There was too much excitement and happiness over the successful escape."

Wattenberg, who up to that point had not breathed a word of his intentions to his fellow escapees, now laid out his plan for Kozur and Kremer. They would *not* be heading south for the Mexican border. At least not yet. Instead, they would head north into the mountains overlooking Phoenix. There they would find a hideout in which to lay low for several days, perhaps several weeks.

"We will live like Indians," the *Kapitän zur See* told his two petty officers.

Wattenberg explained that he had arranged for "one of the clever NCOs from my boat" to assist them. Alfred Dietrich was a resident of Compound 4 and a regular member of work details in and around Papago Park. Dietrich, the same man who had covered for Kremer during his escape attempt from Roswell, had been instructed to enlist the help of other prisoners to smuggle food and supplies from the camp at regular intervals and stash them at a predetermined drop point. These supplies

were meant to sustain Wattenberg, Kozur, and Kremer while hiding in the mountains.

There would be an inevitable uproar following the discovery of the mass escape, the men knew. There would be hasty searches by patrols of soldiers and scores of policemen. There would probably be airplanes and bloodhounds involved in the search. Local civilians, frightened by American propaganda, would arm themselves and pose an even greater danger. There would be a public outcry, perhaps a political one as well, which would fuel the frantic efforts to locate the fugitive Germans. Once this initial period of hysteria had subsided, Wattenberg told them, they would abandon their hideout and begin their journey to freedom. Kozur and Kremer listened to the plan and nodded obediently.

The three German sailors remained in the orchard throughout Christmas Eve, trying to sleep despite the adrenaline coursing through their bodies and the bothersome rain that dripped from the leaves of the grapefruit trees. Eventually, they heard the sirens of Papago Park.

"The strong west wind carried the sound to us," Wattenberg wrote. "The devil must be loose in the camp."

The rain was still beating down steadily as Captain Cecil Parshall rushed to the camp headquarters building. After the mayhem of the previous evening, the assistant director of internal security and assistant provost marshal of Camp Papago Park had been looking forward to passing a quiet Christmas Eve at the Officer's Club. That simple hope had been in vain, Parshall realized, as soon as Lieutenant William Watson burst into the room. Twenty-five German prisoners of war were missing, Parshall was informed, all but two of them from Watson's own compound. A thorough search of all stockades had failed to find any of them and the base had been put on alert.

Parshall tossed his poker hand onto the table. Assemble a roster listing the names of all of the escaped prisoners, Parshall instructed Watson, and bring it to the provost marshal's office.

Regulations Governing Prisoners of War, a War Department circular issued in September 1943, specified that "the Federal Bureau of

Investigation, Department of Justice, is charged with the responsibility for coordinating the search for escaped prisoners. Camp commanders will coordinate with the Special Agent in Charge of the nearest local field office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation concerning the procedure to be followed upon the escape of a prisoner including the notification of officials, civilian and military, in the vicinity of the camp and those in other localities through which an escaped prisoner will be likely to travel in effecting his escape. Upon the escape of a prisoner, notification will be telephoned immediately by the camp commander to the field office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and to the Provost Marshal General."

Parshall shook the rain from his cap and lifted the receiver of his office telephone. Had Colonel Holden been located? Not yet, the signal office operator informed the captain, she was still attempting to track him down. Watson soon arrived with the roster of escapees and Captain Parshall asked to be connected with the Phoenix Field Office of the FBI. Just after seven o'clock, while Parshall was busily reading off the list of names and descriptions of the German escapees to the FBI special agent on duty, he received an incoming phone call from Sergeant John Chennault of the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office.

A motorist had stopped to pick up a rain-drenched hitchhiker just west of Tempe, Chennault informed Parshall. Dressed in nondescript clothing and carrying a heavy blue haversack, the man had politely asked for a lift into Phoenix. The motorist obliged, driving directly to the courthouse at First Avenue and Washington Street, which also housed the sheriff's office and county jail. The hitchhiker, whose accent had betrayed him and was now sitting in a holding cell, had identified himself as Petty Officer Herbert Fuchs of the German Navy. He told the sheriff's deputies that he was hoping to be taken back to Papago Park in time for Christmas dinner.

Parshall had barely enough time to process this news and complete his notification to the FBI when he was informed that a woman named Carrene Hunter was calling for him. Two soaking wet and shivering men, Mrs. Hunter informed Parshall, had suddenly appeared on the doorstep of her Tempe home. After admitting that they were two German prisoners of war who had recently escaped from Papago Park, the men "surrendered" to the astonished housewife. The closest available law enforcement

officer, Maricopa County Constable John Gregg, had responded to the Hunter residence to take Ferdinand Fuge and Kurt Strehle into custody and transported them to the county jail in Phoenix.

An hour later the beleaguered Parshall's telephone rang yet again, the Latino voice on the other end of the line chattering excitedly in a mixture of Spanish and English. It was the foreman of a ranch near Tempe, where two weary men claiming to be escaped prisoners of war had just given themselves up. Captain Parshall jotted down the details and then called Sergeant Chennault at MCSO.

Constable Gregg, who had delivered Fuge and Strehle into the sheriff's custody, rushed back to Tempe to find the tired and dejected Helmut Gugger and Herman Streng waiting for him at the ranch. Like the pair who had knocked on Carrene Hunter's door, these two escaped German POWs were cold and hungry and asking to be returned to Papago Park.

It was just before nine o'clock when George Jackson peered warily through the pouring rain at the darkened figure who had just wandered onto the property of the Salt River Valley Water Users Association pumping station in Tempe. The security guard approached the trespasser with his hand on the butt of the revolver at his hip and curtly asked the man his business. After listening to the strange accent that accompanied the request for food and shelter from the cold rain, a suspicious Jackson asked, "Did you escape from the prisoner of war camp?"

"Yes," admitted Karl Frenzel.

At his desk at the provost marshal office at Papago Park, Cecil Parshall received this latest news from Constable John Gregg after Frenzel had joined Gugger and Streng in the Tempe city jail. That made six prisoners recaptured thus far, all of them in Tempe, a small town a few miles to the southeast of Phoenix. All six were enlisted men and had given up without resistance, claiming that they were cold and hungry. None of the diehard Nazi officers of Compound 1A had yet been located. Could these six enlisted sailors have been sacrificial lambs, mere decoys sent in the opposite direction from the flight of the clever U-boat skippers? Assuming that they had escaped during the ruckus in Compound

1B the previous evening, Wattenberg and his band had been gone for over twenty-four hours. They could very well be in Mexico by now.

Just after receiving the call from the constable, Parshall learned that Colonel Holden had arrived on post. "About that time I was ordered by Colonel Holden to report to his headquarters, where the Commanding Officer immediately organized searching parties, sending them to various strategic points around the surrounding country."

Eight armed patrols, each commanded by an officer, clambered into jeeps and trucks and sped off into the rainy night. Each was assigned a waypoint leading away from Phoenix at all points of the compass: the towns of Tempe, Mesa, and Apache Junction to the east, Casa Grande and Picacho Peak to the south, Gila Bend and Wickenberg to the west, the tiny hamlet of New River along the less-likely-taken northern route. The patrols were dispatched "with instructions to investigate any persons who might be prisoners whether or not in prisoner clothing, examine all open trucks and such other vehicles as could be conveniently inspected, and to warn and make inquiry from people situated who observed or could have observed prisoners traveling or attempting to travel or obtain accommodations of any kind."

Holden wanted to know if the Arizona Highway Patrol had been informed of the escape. Parshall assured him that they had. "I then spent the rest of the night, until 0830, 25 December 1944, on duty in the Commanding Officer's office acting as dispatcher and receiving messages from the searching parties who were out," Parshall would later state.

While Colonel Holden and his staff were attempting to coordinate a search for the escaped POWs and answer telephone calls and telegrams from the FBI, the Provost Marshal General's office in Washington, and the Ninth Service Command in Utah, the local press descended upon Papago Park.

Still having little idea as to how two dozen Germans had slipped out of his prison camp, an exhausted Colonel Holden told the *Arizona Republic* that the men may have escaped after scaling the eight-foot fence surrounding their stockade.

"I have still not had complete reports on the break and I hesitate to say exactly what happened," Holden admitted to reporters.

Holden stated further that the escape may have commenced "during the demonstration around 4:45 p.m. Saturday, but more than likely about 7:30 p.m. Sunday." This was, of course, impossible, since the escape had been discovered during the cross-over roll call on Sunday afternoon. The *Casa Grande Dispatch* would comment: "It's pretty silly business, I'd say, when the commandant of the POW camp at Papago Park in his initial announcement is not sure on WHAT DAY his jolly German submariners vamoosed."

On 26 December 1944 the Three Crazy Boatmen, having escaped from captivity and completed an arduous thirty-mile trek across the desert carrying heavy rucksacks and a handmade canoe, stopped in their tracks to stare out over the Gila River.

It was dry.

"Those stupid Americans!" Wolfgang Clarus cried out. "They put a blue line on the map when there's no water in the river!"

In Arizona, the annual harvest of cotton, by far the most widely cultivated crop in the region, is usually completed by Christmas. Planting of cotton does not resume until March, making the demand for water used for agricultural purposes and the release of water from the Coolidge Dam quite minimal. Consequently, the Gila River is reduced to a mere trickle in wintertime. In December 1944 the runoff from recent rains had contributed some water to the Gila, but not much. At several places Wolfgang Clarus, Frederich Utzolino and Wilhelm Günther could step across what amounted to a succession of shallow pools.

The Three Crazy Boatmen did make a few half-hearted attempts to launch their craft but it was of no use: the water was so shallow that their weight along with that of the haversacks hopelessly grounded their boat. As dusk approached, the would-be river runners made their camp beneath a stand of cottonwood trees in the river bottom. By the next morning, the Gila was even lower than the day before.

Exceedingly frustrated but realizing the absurdity and wry humor of their situation, the Three Crazy Boatmen abandoned their plan and their little boat. Along with an ironic chuckle and shake of the head, each shouldered his pack and together they trudged along the sand of the river bottom as it wound to the southwest. Their new strategy was to continue to follow the course of the Gila toward Mexico and freedom . . . on foot.

On New Year's Day 1945, near the tiny settlement of Stanfield, Arizona, a random cholla cactus managed to accomplish what hundreds of soldiers, local law enforcement officers, and federal agents had thus far failed to do: bring to an end the flight of an escaped U-boat officer from Papago Park.

Late afternoon storm clouds were beginning to roll into the skies above Stanfield, the blowing dust stinging the face of Leroy Ashmore as he walked along a lonesome stretch of county road. The teenager had been picking up odd jobs during his holiday break from Coolidge High School and today he was on his way to the ranch of Newton and Verna Cooper in search of work.

When Leroy arrived, he found the Coopers departing in a truck along with two of their ranch hands. They were hurrying to collect sacks of grain that had been left in the fields before the rain began. Verna was glad to see the boy; she had been worried about having to leave her three small children behind while they performed the chore.

"I could use you right now, Leroy," Verna told the boy, "if you want to watch the kids while I go help my husband bring in the seed grain. Don't let anyone in. Those Germans are still on the loose and thought to be headed for Mexico. We're right on that route and I don't want any strangers in my house, particularly Nazis."

After the truck sped off across the windy desert plain, Leroy ambled over to the house. While he stayed indoors to watch the Coopers' six-year-old twin girls, their younger son went outside to play in the yard. Richard Cooper was wearing a replica army uniform and carrying the toy rifle he had received as a Christmas gift. A few minutes after the departure of his parents, the five-year-old watched as two men emerged from the desert to approach the house. One of the strangers was limping

heavily, a makeshift bandage wrapped around his foot. Both paused nervously when the little boy took aim with his toy rifle.

Hans Werner Kraus peered closer and then laughed. "*Ersatz*," he told Helmut Drescher. The rifle was fake. Kraus asked the boy if he could take them inside and Richard happily led the two German escapees to his family's front door, where they were met by an aghast Leroy Ashmore.

The former captain of the *U-199* told Leroy that they were very thirsty. While the hospitable Richard poured glasses of water for the two uninvited guests, Kraus and Drescher made themselves comfortable in the living room. Leroy was too paralyzed by fear to protest. Not only was he in close quarters with two escaped Nazis, he had allowed them into Verna Cooper's home against her explicit instructions. Sensing the boy's fright, Hans Werner Kraus, who spoke English fluently, began to tell stories about his own two children and his adventures as a submarine commander.

Drescher didn't participate in the conversation, for he couldn't speak a word of English. Instead he sat resting his swollen foot and sipping at his glass of water. While hiking through the darkened desert landscape two nights before he had blundered into a cholla. Infection soon set in and by New Year's Day Helmut was in agony. He informed Kraus that he could walk no farther and then attempted, quite unsuccessfully, to convince his *Kaleunt* to go on without him.

After what must have seemed like an eternity to young Leroy, the Coopers finally returned with their truck piled high with sacks of grain. Darkness had fallen, and while Newton and his two ranch hands began unloading the truck, Verna went to the house to begin making supper. As she came through the front door, Kraus and Drescher stood to attention.

"We're escaped German officers," Kraus told her. "We wish to surrender."

Verna gaped in disbelief, then looked at Leroy and her three children, who all seemed unharmed. The young woman then bolted outside to return with her bewildered husband, to whom Kraus repeated his request. Apparently the big, imposing rancher looked as if he needed some convincing, so Kraus and Drescher snapped to attention once again and thrust their hands forward in a Nazi salute.

"*Heil Hitler*," they chorused.

Kraus asked if they might be taken into the town of Casa Grande but Newton Cooper replied that he would instead drive them to the Stanfield Branch POW Camp, only two miles away, and turn them over to the Army. Verna remembered her German visitors as being remarkably neat and clean shaven for two men who had supposedly crawled through a tunnel and then crossed fifty miles of desert. Captain Kraus was very well-mannered and polite, Verna thought, and the young dark-haired Drescher had the looks of a matinee idol.

Cooper had the two escaped German prisoners of war climb into his Hudson Terraplane and together they started down the road toward the branch camp. Newton Cooper later told his wife that if the Germans had attempted to overpower him, he planned to crank the steering wheel to one side and roll the big car onto its top. Better to risk injury, Cooper reasoned, than have his car stolen by fleeing Nazis.

Newton glanced at the older, balding German sitting beside him and saw that the man was slowly slipping a hand inside his jacket. The rancher tensed, his hands tightening on the wheel.

Hans Werner Kraus removed a small package from his pocket.

"Cigarette?" he offered.

Reinhard Mark placed his canteen beneath the spout of the village water pump. The first upward stroke of the pump handle caused it to screech in protest, a horribly loud sound that shattered the still night air. In one of the darkened houses nearby a light suddenly switched on, the men waiting breathlessly until it was doused a few moments later. Thankfully, no one came outside to challenge them. The young *Fähnrich* looked to Heinrich Palmer, who gestured for him to continue. They had no choice. Continuing their trek across the desert without water was not an option.

Since Christmas Day Palmer and Mark had made steady progress on their way to Mexico. Leaving their hiding place at Roosevelt School in South Phoenix, they passed through the farm country of Laveen until they found the mountain pass that took them into the vast desert beyond. When the clouds finally parted they continued along a southern bearing

on a path lit by millions of stars. After covering a dozen or so miles of rugged, rolling desert, they came to a halt when dawn painted the eastern sky a dozen hues of purple, pink, and orange. The two shivering and foot-sore sailors rolled into their blankets and fell into a deep sleep.

Over the next five evenings they pressed southward along the route penciled on their highway map and guided by Palmer's stolen compass. On the fifth day, with their canteens empty, they resorted to searching for rainwater pooling within the depressions of the larger rocks along the route. Using tubular cigarette holders for straws, they drew the cool rainwater into their dry mouths.

"The taste was like champagne," Palmer remembered.

Replenishing the supply of water became their immediate priority; without it any further movement to the south across the desert would be impossible. Just after midnight on the final day of 1944, Palmer and Mark visited the creaky water pump in Kaka, a small and far-flung Tohono O'odham village, which even today lists fewer than 150 inhabitants.

Afterward Palmer and Mark continued their journey south in fine spirits. They were able to refill their canteens once again from a rancher's stock tank. On the evening of New Year's Day, while traversing a deserted stretch of road, Palmer came upon a rabbit that had been killed by a passing car. In the morning they left the roadway and made their camp a few hundred yards away in a clump of sagebrush, cooking the rabbit over a fire made from the skeleton of a downed cactus. The mountains of northern Mexico loomed large on the horizon. Well-fed and content after their breakfast, Palmer and Mark wrapped themselves in their blankets and fell asleep with the hope of finally crossing the border after nightfall.

What happened next could best be described as a rude awakening. The two escapees were suddenly roused from their bedrolls by the shouting of men armed with rifles and wearing broad-brimmed cowboy hats. They would soon learn that the village of Kaka, in addition to an ill-repaired water pump, had also been equipped with a telephone. Days before, the Bureau of Indian Affairs had informed the residents of the escape and had told them to be on the lookout for runaway German POWs.

After hearing Palmer and Mark noisily filling their canteens, one of the villagers had placed a call to Orlando Garcia, the acting BIA

superintendent in the nearby town of Sells. Garcia passed the information along to Customs Patrol Officer Fred W. Tully, a forty-five-year-old former Marine who made his living by hunting down smugglers in the desert. Tully recruited two Tohono O'odham scouts for the task and together they drove out to the little village to begin tracking the fugitives. Tully's search was aided by a clue provided by another member of the Tohono O'odham tribe, who stated that she saw strange footprints with a distinctive *V* pattern while hunting near Covered Wells, several miles to the southeast of Kaka.

His eyes falling on the discarded carcass of the rabbit, Tully had assumed the Germans had a gun in their possession. The two slumbering prisoners were manhandled to their feet and roughly frisked. Palmer, who had a fair command of English, explained that they were unarmed and that the rabbit had been roadkill.

"Who else has been caught?" Palmer wanted to know. The date was 2 January 1945. Exactly one year had elapsed since the sinking of the *Weserland* and the beginning of their ordeal as prisoners of war. Now in captivity once again, Palmer and Mark were driven to the Customs Patrol station in Sells. After promising that they would behave themselves and not attempt another escape, the two men were invited into Tully's private residence.

Palmer would later express surprise at the fine treatment they received. They were both permitted to wash, shave, and change clothes before joining Tully and his wife Opal for supper. As night began to fall, word that there were two recaptured Germans from Papago Park at the Tully house quickly made its way around the small town. The curious residents of Sells, wanting to see for themselves what the enemy looked like up close, began to gather at the doorways and windows of the home to stare at a bemused Palmer and Mark. As the two German sailors sat quietly in Tully's living room waiting for the Army to collect them, someone asked if either of the men played chess and would like to accept a challenge from the local champion. Mark, who had passed many evenings at sea by playing chess, replied that he would.

A shy twelve-year-old Tohono O'odham boy came forward, limping from a badly deformed leg. The German midshipman and the young Native American settled themselves before the chessboard and began

what was perhaps the most unusual and well-attended chess match ever to be played on an Indian reservation. As the game progressed, it became apparent that Mark was gaining the upper hand. Palmer nudged his friend, who was bent forward in concentration, and muttered a brief phrase in German.

"Let the kid win," he said.

Like their comrades Palmer and Mark, *Leutnant zur see* Martin Reese and merchant marine First Officer Jürgen Schroder would also be recaptured near Sells, caught unawares while sleeping in the desert. On 4 January 1945 two Tohono O'odham scouts, Fred Claymore and Dewey Jose, tracked the Germans to their campsite seven miles west of the town and took them at gunpoint. For their trouble Claymore and Jose would each receive fifteen dollars.

The surly and indignant Reese, who had served as the second officer aboard *U-606*, would later tell the Board of Officers that he had escaped because he "couldn't stand any longer the insults which were brought upon me by the American personnel." He would make the abrasive Lieutenant Colonel Barber a target of his derision, stating that Holden's former executive officer had accused him of being a "cut throat" and stated that Reese was "no human being." Echoing the sentiments of Jürgen Wattenberg, Reese stated that he had felt particularly maligned at having to stand formation for an American noncom, and also claimed that he had seen commissary lists that revealed the prisoners of Compound 1A were receiving shorter rations than those in the adjoining stockades.

The fact that Reese complained about the inadequacy of the food at Papago Park would prove to be ironic. When Reese and his civilian companion were recaptured, the discovery of a certain food staple in their haversacks would be pointedly revealed by local newspapers, provoking the ire of an already flabbergasted civilian population and lending further credence to the assertion that the Army had been "coddling" prisoners of war.

In the news story "Two Escaped Nazis Taken Near Border," datelined 4 January 1945, the *Arizona Republic* would report that Reese and Schroder "each had 12 cans of milk, a slab of bacon each and several packages

of chewing gum and tobacco." To make certain that this particular fact did not escape the notice of its readers, the *Republic* capped the paragraph with the sub-headline "Packs Contain Bacon."

For many citizens who had been living under three years of strict food rationing imposed by the federal government's Office of Price Administration, the fact that *Nazis* were being fed *bacon* by the US Army was more than they could stand. In response to the *Republic* article, an irate subscriber would soon fire off a letter to the editor:

"Now, isn't that a hell of a state of affairs when we, the taxpaying citizens, cannot get a single slice of bacon for weeks on end when we come home from working in a defense plant, and then read in the paper that prisoners of war can get away with slabs of it?"

Sergeant Theodore Stockton was a native Arizonan and "desert wise" as his commendation would state, which was why he was selected to lead a patrol from Camp Florence to assist in the search for the escapees. On 5 January 1945, near Cortaro, a dozen miles north of Tucson, Sergeant Stockton and his men would locate and capture Kurt Mohrdieck, Frederich Sternberg, and Artur Karstens. Perhaps due to their choice of the well-traveled route between Phoenix and Tucson, their progress had been remarkably slow. It had taken thirteen days for the Panama-bound *flug-gruppe* to travel one hundred miles. For Mohrdieck it would mark the end of his third escape attempt from Papago Park, for Sternberg his second.

By contrast Fritz Guggenberger and his naval academy crewmate Jürgen Quaet-Faslem had managed to hike to within ten miles of the Mexican border by 6 January 1945. The two U-boat commanders had chosen Quaet-Faslem's technique of evasion and avoided populated areas. This method had allowed him to successfully reach Mexico before being recaptured during the five-man breakout the previous February, when Guggenberger had been apprehended in Tucson while trying to catch a southbound train. Guggenberger would later state that the end of their final escape attempt was something of an anticlimax; like the others they would be found sleeping in the desert during the daytime and prodded awake by Native American scouts.

As the *Casa Grande Dispatch* would note, the Papago Park escapees were "being caught more and more rapidly." Sergeant Stockton would demonstrate his tracking skills again two days later when his patrol, accompanied by FBI agents, recaptured Otto Hoferichter and Hans Zundorf twelve miles north of the Sasabe Port of Entry. At two o'clock the following afternoon, the curious saga of the Three Crazy Boatmen would also come to an end.

After discarding their homemade canoe, Clarus, Günther, and Utzolino had followed the dry bed of the Gila south to the point where the river made a 90-degree turn to the west. On the morning of 9 January 1945 they made camp three miles east of the appropriately-named town of Gila Bend. While his two companions settled into their blankets for a nap, Utzolino decided to take a bath in a nearby irrigation canal. He would literally be caught with his pants down.

Taken into custody by two cowboys on horseback, Utzolino was marched into Gila Bend and turned over to Deputy Jack Terry of the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office. Terry quickly gathered a posse of volunteers and notified the soldiers from Papago Park that had been patrolling around Gila Bend before heading to the spot where Utzolino had been found. As deputies and soldiers converged on his camp site, Wolfgang Clarus attempted to flee but was quickly nabbed by a soldier. He then directed the search party to the place where Wilhelm Günther was sprawled under a blanket and sleeping through the entire ordeal.

Seventeen days after the great escape from Papago Park, only three fugitive prisoners of war remained on the run: Jürgen Wattenberg, Walter Kozur, and Johann Kremer.

Jürgen Wattenberg, tucked into the shallow cave above Phoenix with Walter Kozur and Johann Kremer, sat contemplating his next move. They had scouted the surrounding mountains and nearby farms and had not only avoided detection, but had not observed any patrols searching for them. The captain's strategy of lying low during the first frantic days following the escape and "living like Indians" in the mountains north of town seemed to be working.

Before proceeding, however, Wattenberg wanted to obtain a more detailed map of the area and additional intelligence, specifically on the progress of the search and the fate of the other nine *fluggruppen*. The two young petty officers, who were becoming increasingly restless as the days wore on, were all too willing to embark upon the mission.

"I gave each one two dollars," Wattenberg recalled, "and warned them that *daring not foolhardy* is the word, exactly as on the Atlantic, and let them go with a good handshake."

After Kozur and Kremer departed into the cool January night carrying their empty haversacks, Wattenberg tossed fitfully in his blankets before finally giving up any hope of sleep. Just before the break of dawn Wattenberg heard the crunching of GI shoes on the trail leading up to the cave. The two sailors grinned at their skipper beneath the burden of their packs, one of which was stuffed with pilfered fruit while the other contained a loose bundle of newspapers. They had also acquired for their captain a new and better map.

Not only had Kozur and Kremer managed to find an unlocked kiosk in downtown Phoenix and obtain a full two weeks' worth of back issues from local newspapers, they had also eaten a meal at a diner without being recognized. They had even dropped into a bowling alley for a few beers. The slightly nettled *Kapitän zur See,* who believed that in their brash youthfulness his men had taken his *daring not foolhardy* directive to the extreme, would later admit that they had at least "resisted the temptation to go to a movie or to pick up some pretty girls."

Wattenberg pored over the newly liberated editions of the *Arizona Republic* and *Phoenix Gazette,* finding that all of the other escapees had been recaptured. "Thus it seemed that none of the groups that went south made it to Mexico. They couldn't hide their tracks when they had to cross the extensive Sonoran desert. We were sorry, but we were proud we had chosen the right path."

The captain would be surprised at how prominently his name had appeared in the news articles describing the escape and how they had chronicled his naval career, including his service aboard the *Graf Spee*. Wattenberg would find one headline in particular to be quite amusing: "Wholesale Nazi Escape Screened Big Shot's Flight."

A daylight reconnaissance to the summit of Squaw Peak had boosted their confidence. Wattenberg would later state that the expedition had served as "proof of how safe we now felt in the neighborhood," and that the men now "felt secure enough to undertake a visit to the arranged-for food cache." That same evening Johann Kremer, carrying a note of thanks signed by the *Kapitän zur See,* set out from their mountain hideout for the supply drop point.

Alfred Dietrich, like Johann Kremer and Walter Kozur, held the rank of *Maschinengefreiter* and had served as an electrician aboard the *U-162.* One of the original group of German naval prisoners to arrive in Papago Park in January 1944, Dietrich had been put to work installing and repairing power lines. Quite often, Dietrich was called upon to perform repairs on the electrical systems of Army vehicles at the Service Command vehicle repair yard on McDowell Road, three miles from Papago Park.

"During the time of the escape I was in Compound 4," Dietrich later recalled. "Every day we would drive out to the arsenal with a truck convoy. In the arsenal was an area where cars were repaired. We left food and supplies in an abandoned car."

Johann easily found the derelict vehicle and returned to the cave with a sack containing fruit along with several packs of cigarettes. Also in the sack was a note from Dietrich. The drop point was compromised, the sailor informed his captain. Some Italian POWs were working in the immediate area and could not be trusted; a new supply cache could be found five hundred meters to the east along the edge of McDowell Road.

Kremer volunteered to return to the repair yard the next evening to find the new drop point. He would return empty handed, having scoured the surrounding area without result. Now left without the source of information and resupply that was integral to his original plan, Wattenberg and his men huddled in their rock shelter high above the city and pondered their dilemma. Before long they would arrive at a bold solution, a new and incredibly audacious scheme to gather further intelligence and organize a new supply drop: Johann Kremer would return to once again become a prisoner at Papago Park.

"There were thirty or forty prisoners working there outside of the camp," Johann Kremer described. "So I knew if I mingled with these men during the day, then in the evening when they were done working, I could return to the camp with them—and that's how I got back into the camp."

As incredible as it may sound, Kremer's method for infiltrating the work column returning to Papago Park on Saturday, 20 January 1945, worked for one simple reason: the soldiers guarding the detail were not concerned with an overage of prisoners when performing their head count, only a shortage. Over the next three days, in an attempt to secure additional information and organize a new supply line, Kremer spoke with several prisoners in the camp, including one Fritz Snobeck.

Snobeck was assigned to Papago Park's branch camp in the cotton fields of Eleven Mile Corner in neighboring Pinal County. The same day that Johann Kremer blended into the work detail and returned to the camp, Fritz Snobeck was brought to the Papago Park hospital after feigning an illness, as many prisoners of war were apt to do after growing weary of picking cotton and living in the harsh conditions of the remote and primitive branch camps. Snobeck wandered away from the hospital without being noticed for quite some time and into Compound 4 where he had once been quartered.

Even though they were already under intense scrutiny for the now-famous tunnel escape, it took three days for the commands of Papago Park and Eleven Mile Corner to sort through the confusion and determine that Snobeck was missing. As Major Tays and Captain Parshall led a shakedown of the stockades, Colonel Holden once again found himself in the humiliating position of having to contact the Phoenix Field Office of the FBI and report that another of his prisoners of war had gone missing.

During the feverish hunt through the camp, a POW was discovered hiding in the attic space of the camp library within Compound 4. As he was hauled down and questioned, the man told the guards that his name was Fritz Snobeck. Greatly relieved that they had found their man without further drama, and without bothering to verify his claim, the guards

of Papago Park readily believed what the prisoner told them. The man was, in fact, Johann Kremer.

Unfortunately for Kremer, one of the other prisoners he had conversed with since his return to the camp had been Helmut Gugger.

Gugger had decided to throw his lot in with the Americans. Besides providing the Board of Officers with ten pages of sworn testimony on the tunnel escape, Gugger had also willingly given up additional intelligence on the preparations for the tunnel escape. In an effort to secure additional favor with his captors while awaiting transfer to another POW camp, Gugger informed Tays and Parshall that the man in their custody was actually Johann Kremer, not Fritz Snobeck. Gugger spilled to the Americans everything that Kremer had told him, including the fact that Kremer had been hiding in the mountains with Wattenberg and Kozur, and had returned to the camp in the hope of arranging a new drop point for food and supplies. Shortly after betraying Kremer, Helmut Gugger was transferred to Camp Ruston, Louisiana.

The hunt for Fritz Snobeck was back on. The FBI would announce Snobeck's disappearance to the press that same evening, Tuesday, 23 January 1945, admitting that he "may have been gone since Saturday." A disgusted *Casa Grande Dispatch* would print the story beneath the headline "THEY DON'T EVEN KNOW WHEN GERMANS ESCAPE."

"It took a week for them to find Fritz," Kremer would recall with a chuckle. Snobeck would eventually be recognized in a crowd of prisoners within Compound 4 and hauled off to solitary confinement. For the hard-pressed Colonel Holden, the delay in discovering Snobeck's absence, coupled with the dereliction of duty surrounding the tunnel escape, was more than enough cause to relieve Major Eugene Tays from the position of Director of Internal Security and Intelligence for Papago Park.

"Search for an escaped Nazi naval officer was intensified today following recapture at an army establishment here of one of the 25 Nazi prisoners of war who tunneled out of nearby Papago Park internment camp a month ago," the *United Press* would report on 25 January 1945. "Two soldiers apprehended Walter Kozur last night at a service command vehicle repair

area less than three miles from the internment camp. No explanation was forthcoming from army authorities or the Federal Bureau of Investigation on what the Nazi was doing at the army installation or how long he had been there."

When Johann Kremer failed to return to the mountain hideout after four days, Walter Kozur had made an attempt to find the supplies that Alfred Dietrich and the others had supposedly cached along McDowell Road, only to be recaptured himself. Of the twenty-five prisoners of war involved in the Great Desert Escape, only Jürgen Wattenberg was still at large.

"After three days of waiting I decided to set out toward Phoenix," Wattenberg wrote.

Wattenberg changed into his best clothes, the yellow checkered sport shirt he had ordered from Sears and Roebuck while interned at Crossville and a pair of GI wool trousers that had been died a dark blue to conceal the *PW* stencil on each leg. A few dollars in change jingled in his pockets. Shouldering his battered haversack, which contained what was left of his supply of food, blankets, cigarettes, and shaving kit, the captain headed south.

As he hiked across the desert toward the city lights, Wattenberg considered his options. With what little money he had left, he would feed himself and purchase supplies. He would attempt to blend in, maybe even get a job in a café washing dishes. Stuffed into one of his trouser pockets were announcements of church services clipped from the newspapers Kremer and Kozur had stolen. Perhaps he could get help from a Catholic priest under the sanctity of confession, Wattenberg thought.

It had grown dark by the time he reached the outskirts of the city. "Autos went by and people passed, but no one bothered about me," Wattenberg described. "Ever nearer came the glow of the big city. I thought of my homeland where everything was in darkness and of my family in Neustadt on the Baltic."

As he walked along the bustling sidewalks of downtown Phoenix, the smells wafting from the various restaurant kitchens caused Wattenberg's stomach to grumble in protest. He selected a Chinese restaurant on Central Avenue and took a table inside. The fare would be cheap, allowing

him to conserve his meager funds, and the staff less likely to engage in conversation. Wattenberg enjoyed a large dish of beef and noodle soup and quaffed a cold beer before returning to the street.

"Then a great fatigue hit me and I told myself that I must sleep somewhere and rest so I wouldn't make any mistakes," Wattenberg wrote.

On any given Saturday night the restaurants and bars of downtown Phoenix and the cathouses of its seedy Red Light Row were crowded with soldiers on weekend furlough. The evening of 27 January 1945 was no exception; Wattenberg was unable to find a vacancy in any of the hotels that he visited, the rooms all taken by groups of uniformed young men and their wives and girlfriends, looking to turn loose and blow off a little steam. Finally the German submarine commander wandered into the grand lobby of the Hotel Adams.

The popular Adams was also completely full. There would be a room open in the morning, the desk clerk told him, until then he was welcome to rest in the lobby. The exhausted Wattenberg thanked the clerk and settled into a lobby chair where he fell asleep. When he awoke it was well past midnight. Perhaps it would be best to not indulge in a hotel room and save his money, Wattenberg decided, as he would be needing it to purchase food.

"I got up and left the porter with a friendly word and started toward the railway station, where I thought I might find a hiding place in a freight car," Wattenberg wrote. Map in hand, Wattenberg headed north for two blocks to Van Buren Street. Unsure if he was on the correct route (he wasn't) and happening upon a work party from the City of Phoenix Street Department, the German officer asked for assistance from the crew's foreman.

Clarence Cherry eyed Wattenberg suspiciously, even as he provided directions to the city's Union Station at 4th Avenue and Harrison. Wattenberg thanked Cherry and "set out with a good feeling of being free in a big city." Shortly after Wattenberg departed, Cherry spotted police officer Gilbert Brady walking north on Second Avenue.

The seven-year veteran of the Phoenix Police Department was working the graveyard shift as desk sergeant at the downtown headquarters and was on his lunch break. Cherry informed Brady that the man who

had just asked him for directions to the "railway station" had done so with a rather peculiar accent.

Sergeant Brady caught up with Wattenberg near Third Avenue and Van Buren and asked him to produce identification. Wattenberg replied that he had none.

"You don't have a Selective Service or alien registration card?" Brady asked.

"I've left them at home," Wattenberg replied, "because I only wanted to spend one night in Phoenix."

"And where do you live?" the policeman asked.

"In Glendale," Wattenberg said.

"Glendale, Arizona? Or Glendale, California?"

"Glendale, back east," was Wattenberg's evasive answer.

Sergeant Brady flagged down a passing patrol car. "Please get in," he said to Wattenberg. It had been thirty-seven days since Jürgen Wattenberg and his men had escaped from Papago Park.

In the back seat of the police car, the *Kapitän zur See* sighed heavily.

"The game is up and I've lost," he told the policemen. "I'm the big shot you fellows have been looking for."

Chapter Six

The Long Walk

Slavomir Rawicz

It was about nine o'clock one bleak November day that the key rattled in the heavy lock of my cell in the Lubyanka Prison and the two broad-shouldered guards marched purposefully in. I had been walking slowly round, left hand in the now characteristic prisoner's attitude of supporting the top of the issue trousers, which Russian ingenuity supplied without buttons or even string on the quite reasonable assumption that a man preoccupied with keeping up his pants would be severely handicapped in attempting to escape. I had stopped pacing at the sound of the door opening and was standing against the far wall as they came in. One stood near the door; the other took two or three strides in. "Come," he said. "Get moving."

For me, this day—twelve months after my arrest in Pinsk on 19 November 1939—was to be important. I was being marched off to my trial before the Soviet Supreme Court. Here in Moscow, shambling through the echoing narrow corridors of the Lubyanka between my two guards, I was a man almost shorn of identity, ill-fed, abysmally lonely, trying to keep alive some spark of resistance in the dank prison atmosphere of studied official loathing and suspicion of me. Just a year before, when the Russian security men walked into the welcome-home party my mother had arranged for me in the family house at Pinsk, I was Lieutenant Rawicz of the Polish Cavalry, aged twenty-four, slim and smart in my well-tailored uniform and whipcord breeches and shining riding boots. My condition now was a tribute to the unflagging brutalities and the

expert subtleties of NKVD (Soviet Secret Police) interrogators at Minsk and Kharkov. No prisoner can forget Kharkov. In pain and filth and degradation they try to turn a man into a whimpering beast.

Shortly stated, the indictment might have read: *You, Slavomir Rawicz, being a well-educated middle-class Pole and an officer in the anti-Russian Polish Army, having a home near the Russian border, are therefore beyond any question of doubt a Polish spy and an enemy of the people of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics.* It remained only for the court to ask, with some asperity, why waste our time with denials?

The president stood, the court stood. He read the charges at length. He announced that the court had found me guilty of espionage and plotting against the people of the USSR.

"You will therefore be sentenced to twenty-five years forced labor."

It must have been in the last week in January 1941, when we had spent over forty days on the march, that the third and most violent blizzard hurled itself out of the north and at last bogged down the lorries. The convoy had covered well over eight hundred miles from Irkutsk. The long line of trucks and men piled forward on itself and raggedly came to a standstill.

The chains were unhooked from the lorries and the prisoners marched off ahead, crunching into the fresh snow, beating out a track and laboriously treading down the snow. The lorries crept after us. We struggled on for a mile until we came to the blessed haven of a belt of woods. Somehow we got the fires going, hundreds of them, and all through the raging night tended them for our lives.

On the eighth or ninth day after leaving the lorries we entered a vast forest which, from high ground some hours before, we had seen stretching ahead of us unbrokenly as far as the eye could range. We noticed, too, that the soldiers were showing some signs of cheerfulness and guessed, rightly as it turned out, that this must be a landmark near the end of the journey. There were lights ahead and voices calling.

This, then, was our destination—Camp Number 303, on the north side of the Lena River, which I estimate to have been between two and three hundred miles southwest of the northern Siberia capital, Yakutsk.

Over a thousand miles of marching from Irkutsk and we had got here. I found myself marveling. In spite of my physical misery I had a feeling that was almost happy. The awful strain of two months on the road was over. Nothing the next day could bring could be worse. I think I must have been a bit light-headed.

The first day of my life in a Soviet labor camp was before me.

A faint, early morning haze dissipated and in the cold, clear light of day I looked round at the place to which I had been consigned to spend twenty-five years of my life. Camp 303, lying between three and four hundred miles south of the Arctic Circle, was a rectangular enclosure about half a mile long and about four hundred yards broad, at each corner of which stood a guard tower raised high on solid timber stilts, manned by machine-gun crews. The main gate, around which were built the troops' quarters, the kitchens, storehouses, and administrative huts, faced west in one of the shorter sides of the oblong.

Between us and the surrounding forest were the typical defenses of a prison camp. Looking from the inside, the first barrier to freedom was an unbroken ring of coiled barbed wire, behind which were two twelve-feet-high log palisades presenting a smooth surface inwards but strongly buttressed on the far side. Both outer sides of the two wooden walls were protected by rolled barbed wire. The space between the two provided a well-beaten track giving access from the main gate guardroom to all four control towers, and was regularly patrolled by armed sentries accompanied at night by police dogs, who shared kennels near the west gate with a pack of sled dogs.

The log-built prisoner barracks were about eighty yards long by ten yards wide conforming in situation with the general plan of the camp itself, the doors, facing west, in the narrow end and protected from the direct blast of wind and snow by a small covered porch with a southerly opening. It was obvious that there was no accommodation for us newcomers.

Into the middle of the parade ground soldiers carried out a portable wooden platform. Accompanied by a small armed guard, two Russian colonels walked through the ranks to the foot of the platform. One of

them stepped up. From my place in the front row I eyed him closely. He was tall, slim, and distinguished looking, his hair greying at the temples, a typical example of a professional soldier in any army. The colonel turned his head slowly to look at us all. There was perfect silence.

He spoke clearly and crisply in Russian. "I am Colonel Ushakov," he said. "I am commandant of this camp. You have come here to work and I expect from you hard work and discipline. I will not talk to you of punishment since you probably know what to expect if you do not behave.

"Our first job is to provide shelter for you. Your first task, therefore, will be to build barracks for yourselves. How quickly you get inside out of the weather depends on your own efforts.

"I expect no trouble from you. If you have any complaints I will always listen to them, and I will do what is in my power to help you. There are no doctors here but there are trained soldiers who can administer first-aid. Those of you who are now too sick after your journey to work will be accommodated in the existing barracks while the rest of you get on with the new buildings. That is all I have to say."

The camp was awakened by a bugle at 5 a.m. and there was an early morning procession of half-asleep men to the latrine trenches inside the wire behind the building site. Then would follow the line-up for breakfast. Tools were issued from the store on the left side of the gate, carefully checked out and as scrupulously checked in again at the end of the day. As we marched out of the gate a tallyman checked our names against his lists.

The forest was mainly of pine, but there was also an abundance of birch and larch. I worked in a felling team, handling one end of a heavy, cross-cut, two-man saw. Occasionally I was able to get some variation by lopping with an axe the branches of the trees. Since the days of my boyhood on the estate at Pinsk I had always been handy with an axe and I enjoyed the work. I found my strength coming back daily. I became absorbed in the bustle and activity. There was a glow of pride and satisfaction in being able to use my hands again. At 1 p.m. we went back to the camp, man-handling the timber we had cut back to the builders. We received a midday issue of soup and returned to the forest to work until the light faded. Each day the line of huts increased in length.

A fortnight after our arrival the huts were finished. I was allocated a bunk in one of the last half-dozen to be completed and I well remember the wonderful feeling of shelter and warmth, protection, and comfort I felt the first night I came in out of the chilling night into my new home. By the end of the first month the camp had settled into a disciplined rhythm of life. All working prisoners were given four hundred grams of bread (some fourteen ounces) a day and those too sick to work received three hundred grams. The mortality rate continued high in that first month. Many of the men who survived the death march wrecked in body and mind never did any work. They were given bunks in the existing huts when we arrived and, worn out beyond endurance, just lay there day after day until they lost their feeble grip on life.

The insistent, hammering thought always was, "Twenty-five years in this place." Many of these men I now knew would die as the years passed. There would be fresh entries. And I would get older and older. Twenty-five years. Twenty-five years. As long to go as I had already lived. But how to get out? And having beaten the wire and the formidable wooden fences, where would one escape to? No man could ever hope to fight his way out alone against the crushing hazards of this country with its immense distances. Where, having planned an escape, could one find resolute men to make the attempt? These, and other questions, I put to myself. And I had no answers.

I fell in with a man named Grechinen on the way to the latrines one evening. "Grechinen," I said, "if I could one day think up a plan of escape, would you come with me?" A frown creased his forehead. "Are you serious?" I nodded. Grechinen ran his fingers slowly through his beard. "Rawicz," he answered finally, "I will think about it tonight and tell you tomorrow."

Cautious Grechinen. I saw him the next day in the wide space between the two rows of huts. "No," he said. "I would come with you if there was a chance, but the snow and the cold would kill us before we could get anywhere, even if the Russians didn't catch us." I shrugged my shoulders. "I still don't want to die young," added Grechinen.

We had been there a month when the commandant called for volunteers for a new job. He wanted men who had experience in making skis.

I had once made a pair of skis. I could not claim to be an expert, but for an extra three or four ounces of bread a day I was willing to try my hand.

The ski shop was the other half of the building occupied by the library. My achievement in having once made a pair of skis earned me a job inside the hut on the last stage of steaming and shaping. On the second day we turned out our first two pairs of skis. Two soldiers then took them away and tested them on a run through the forest. They passed both tests. At the end of the week Ushakov came to the shop and announced that samples sent away to Yakutsk had been accepted as up to the standard required by the Red Army. Our bread ration would go up immediately to a kilogram a day—over double the normal ration—and there would be more tobacco for us. At the end of a fortnight we were turning out 160 pairs of skis a day.

Working all day in the warmth of the ski shop, with the big stove roaring all day for the steaming of the wood, I felt I was getting back towards my full strength again. It should have made me resigned to my sentence, but instead it turned my thoughts more and more to escape. I began to wonder how I could preserve and hide some of my extra bread. I still had no workable plan and I could not know then that I was soon to get help from a most unexpected quarter.

I had volunteered once and struck lucky. I volunteered again one cold, blustery Sunday morning in mid-March as flurries of snow swept about the hunched-up prisoners at the weekly parade.

"In my quarters," said Ushakov, "I have a radio set. It is called a Telefunken. Is there any of you who knows this make of set well enough to do a repair job?" I knew the Telefunken, because we had one at home—a German make, I think, made under license in a factory at Wilno for the Polish market. Men turned their heads to see who might step forward. There was a full minute of silence and nobody made a move. I had a sudden panic that somebody else would get the job. I stuck up my hand and called out. An NCO stepped up and took my name and my place of work. "I will send for you when I want you," said the commandant.

It was to be a fateful decision, launching me into the last and most extraordinary phase of my stay at Camp 303. In this isolated community

of between five and six thousand men under sentence and a battalion strength of officers and men, there was but one woman. The defective Telefunken was to be the means of my meeting her, and, so far as I knew, I was the only prisoner who ever talked to her.

The following afternoon as I worked in the ski shop, the commandant's messenger, a moon-faced private named Igor, called for me. I confess I felt nervous as I walked away from the ski shop, across in front of the big gate, past the officers' mess to the commandant's house standing on the other side of the camp at the northwest corner of the parade ground. Igor ushered me in. "I have come to look at the set, *Gospodin Polkovnik*," I said in Russian, using the old Russian style of respectful address to a colonel.

"Yes, of course. I will show it to you." He stepped past me and out through the door I had just entered, looked around, and came back in.

The woman sat in front of the stove, which had been placed so that it protruded through the partition which divided the home into two rooms, so heating both halves. The colonel murmured a conventional introduction to his wife. I bowed and said something formal and she smiled with a small inclination of her head. I found myself staring at her. She was the first woman I had met since I left my wife and my mother in Pinsk. I felt awkward and ill at ease, painfully aware of my ugly clothes, my beard and my long hair which curled over the neck of my jacket. I could not take my eyes off her.

She stood up and I saw she was tall for a woman. She wore a long thick skirt and a dark woollen cardigan over a white, flower-embroidered cotton blouse. I was never much good at guessing women's ages, but I think she would have been nearing forty. I came out of my fleeting trance to find her blue eyes regarding me in a look of frank pity and sympathy. And I turned my head away and saw Ushakov standing in the doorway between the two rooms looking at me in that preoccupied and detached manner of his. "Let me show you the radio," he said.

Hanging on the wall was a big contour map of Eastern Siberia—an extraordinary production in that instead of place-names there were only numbers. There was also a plan of the camp and a colored portrait of Joseph Stalin. On a bench under the all-seeing eye of Stalin was the radio, a brand-new, battery-operated Telefunken.

Ushakov gave me a Pushki cigarette, fetched over a kerosene lamp and set it down on a bench near me. I took the back off the set and began running my fingers along the leads, suspecting a loose connection somewhere. Ushakov asked me questions about the set, where it was made, what it cost, how it worked. Hesitantly, I inquired where he had got it. "I happened unfortunately," he answered, "to be in charge of troops in Poland in 1939, and I acquired it there." My mind seized on the use of the word "unfortunately." It tied in with the theory which the prisoners expressed that even to be commandant of a camp in Siberia was in the nature of a punishment. I had the impression then, later to be strengthened, that Ushakov owed his appointment to Siberia to some indiscretion during the Polish campaign.

He went back to the fire and sat down on the polished bench with his wife. I worked on, unhurriedly checking the circuit. As I worked I surprised myself with the thought that I was not going to rush this job, that this was my most pleasant experience since my arrest and that I must make it last. When Igor came to collect me, I explained that checking all the leads and valves was a slow business. "Very well," said Ushakov, "you must come again. I will send for you." He gave me another cigarette and I went off with my escort.

Igor fetched me again the next day. As I fiddled with the set, they both talked to me. Ushakova was interested in my family, impressed by the fluency of my Russian. I told her my mother was Russian.

"What did you do to get sent here?" This was the colonel.

"Nothing," I said.

"You have twenty-five years, haven't you?"

"Yes."

There was a pause and then she spoke. "Twenty-five years is a long time. How old are you?" I told her I was twenty-five.

The three-cornered conversation was interspersed with odd silences. They sat close together on the bench; I was on my haunches looking over the top of the Telefunken. Surprisingly, Ushakov asked me if I thought Russia would be involved in another war.

"In Poland," I said, "it was common knowledge that Goering came to us to get us to give the Germans a corridor through which they could

attack Russia. Germany is ready and the attack is inevitable." I gabbled it out fast. I expected to be told I was talking too much. But neither Ushakov nor his wife made any comment.

"Did you find the war very cruel?" she asked me eventually. I told her about the roads choked by fleeing Polish women and children and old men, and how the Stukas came screaming down and blasted them. "That is war," said the colonel. "When you chop wood somebody is always liable to be hurt by splinters."

She asked me about pre-war Poland. What were the women's fashions? They were often elegant, I said, straight from Paris. And high-heeled shoes? Yes, I said. They, too, were very attractive.

Two days went by before I was summoned again and meanwhile my workmates chaffed me that I couldn't mend the set anyway and that the commandant was going to get fed up with the delay.

On this third visit I started straightaway to get the Telefunken working. Ushakov was busy at his desk and the woman did the talking. She asked me about the films I used to see and was surprised to hear that Russian films were banned in Poland. As she talked I switched on. The radio hummed into life and I began to turn the dials. Ushakov left his work and came over beside me. We heard a concert from Moscow. I went from station to station, picking up fragments of news and finally we heard the voice of Hitler, ranting in his own unmistakable fashion, at a youth rally in the Ruhr—I think it was Düsseldorf.

Ushakov gave me a whole packet of *korizhki* tobacco and a sheet of old newspaper. As Igor stood in the doorway waiting to escort me away, he said, "If the set needs any attention, I will send for you again. I am afraid we do not understand how to work it very well."

It was now nearing the end of March. I worked uninterruptedly for several days in the ski shop and began regretfully to think that the Telefunken episode was over. Just about that time I came to know a remarkable man named Anastazi Kolemenos. I had seen him come in occasionally to warm himself at the big fire. He was one of the finest physical specimens I have ever seen, over six feet tall, blond-haired and blond-bearded, with curious grey-green eyes. In spite of the privations he had endured, he must have weighed fourteen stone. He was a kind

and helpful giant of a man, whose job was to carry the birch logs and split them for use in the ski shop.

I was standing outside the ski shop door watching him this day. I walked across to where he had piled some logs and went to lift one to take it over to him. The end came up easily enough. I tried to get a grip round the middle to hoist it up. It defied my efforts. Then, suddenly, Kolemenos was beside me. "That's all right, friend," he said, "I'll do it." He bent down and swung the log onto his shoulder in one powerful movement. I did not regard myself as a weakling, but this man's strength was phenomenal. I spoke to him, spontaneously told him who I was. Kolemenos told me his name, volunteered the information that he had been a landowner in Latvia, that he was now twenty-seven years of age. The old escape idea came surging into my mind, but this was no place to talk of it. "We will have a talk some time," I said.

"I shall be glad to," answered the giant.

Over the clatter of workshop activity they called out to me, "Your friend has called for you again." Igor stood stolidly inside the door and beckoned. I put down a ski I was testing, dusted myself down, and walked out with him.

Ushakov was there and she was there. He told me the set was not working as well as it did. I tested it and it seemed to function, although the signal strength was down a little. I said he would be advised to get spare batteries. He said he would arrange that. He put on his greatcoat, murmured something to her about having to attend an officers' meeting, and went out. There was great understanding between these two and they were completely devoted to each other.

"I will make some tea for you," she smiled. "You can find me a station with some good music." She talked on for a while about the music she liked, praised Chopin but declared her favorite composer to be Tchaikovsky. I found her the kind of music she wanted and she talked about herself with a symphony orchestra as the background. She talked to draw me out, to get me to tell her about myself. It was as though she were saying, "This is me, this is my life. You can trust me." I didn't quite know why this was happening to me. I said to myself that in spite of his exalted position here, these are really exiles and outcasts. She, especially, is almost as

much a prisoner as I am. She is here only because he is here, and probably the real ruler of Camp 303 is the Politruk.

We sipped hot tea and she kept her voice low. This was the story she told me. Her family had been army officers for generations before the Revolution. Her father had been a colonel in the czar's personal guard and had been shot by the Bolsheviks. Her young cadet brother died of wounds received in the defense of the Smolny Institute. Her mother had fled with her from their home near Nijni Novgorod and when, later, the mother died, she had adapted herself to the new order of life, got herself a work-card and found herself a job. She did well and earned herself a State holiday with other favored workers at Yalta. And there she met Ushakov. I gathered that from then on he was the only man in her life.

She was very loyal to Ushakov. She did not tell me why he had suddenly been posted from Poland. He went first to Vladivostok and she had no word from him for six months. Ushakova knew some Party people with the right influence. They told her he was going to Siberia in charge of a camp and she strove unceasingly until her friends got her a travel permit to join him.

All the time I was telling myself: She talks to me because I am a prisoner and she is sorry for me and because she cannot talk about these kind of things to her own people. Yet, amid lingering doubts, there was the conviction that this was an intelligent, sensitive, and most compassionate woman, and this camp, which surrounded her with the evidence of cruelly wasted lives, had shocked her. It was no place for a woman.

Those clear blue eyes held mine. "Do *you* ever think of escape?" The question panicked me. There was awful danger in it. I had my mouth open and could not speak. I put the cup down with a clumsy thump. And her eyes, wide open and blue and candid, held me still and watched my flutterings of fear.

The quiet voice was going on. "You do not answer, Rawicz. You do not trust me. I thought you might want to talk about it. There is no danger in talking to me about it. . . ."

Escape. Escape. It was as though she had looked into my mind and plucked out that one word of danger and longing and hope. Yes, I wanted

to tell her about my perilous dreams. But she had shocked me into silence. The words would not come.

Then came Igor and I turned to go, disconcerted and miserable, like a man who has turned his head from the extended hand of a friend. She spoke coolly and formally. "You will come again if the set wants adjusting?" My words came in a rush. "Yes, yes, of course I will. I shall be glad to."

I felt a slow burn of excitement as I waited through the next few days to see if I would get another call. I met a man named Sigmund Makowski, a thirty-seven-year-old captain in the Polish frontier forces. A precise, clear-thinking fellow, fit, active, and bearing the stamp of the Regular Army officer. I marked him down, as I had marked Kolemenos, but I said nothing of my plans at this stage. I do not know what I expected of Ushakova, but at least I thought she would be in a position to advise.

Call for me she did, and when I had tuned in the radio, dallying round the dial to pick up some news items for my friends, she started casually enough to talk of the approaching short Siberian summer. I took the plunge. "I am sorry about the last time," I said. "Of course, I do think of those things, but the distances are so great, the country so difficult, and I have no equipment to face such a journey."

"You are only twenty-five," she answered. "You need not have been afraid to admit that you do not look forward to the next twenty-five years in these surroundings. It was something to talk about between us. I am reasonably well looked after here. We have comfortable quarters, much better food than yours, and as many cigarettes as we need. But I couldn't spend twenty-five years here. So escape must be an idea close to your heart and it may do you good to tell me what you think."

So we talked of it as an abstract thing, as though it were being contemplated by some third person. We posed the question: Supposing a man could get out of the camp, where could he head for? The only possibility for such a man, I thought, would be to dash due east the short six hundred miles to Kamchatka and from there find his way to Japan. The attempt would be a failure, in her opinion. The Kamchatka coast was a Number One security commitment and would be heavily guarded. Could he smuggle himself onto a westbound train, maybe find himself a job in the Ural mines and possibly make his way out of Russia later? There

would be difficulties of travel and work permits and other vital papers, she said. That was all the exploring we did that day, and it was not until I lay thinking things over on my bunk that night that I realized the one escape route she appeared deliberately to have ignored—south, past Lake Baikal. Whence from there? Afghanistan was the name that popped into my mind. It sounded sufficiently neutral and obscure.

That night I spoke to Makowski. I walked him over to the latrines. "What would you think of an escape?"

"Don't be crazy, man. We have nothing to escape with, even if we got outside the camp."

"I might get a little help."

"If you can, I'm with you. To hell with this place."

Ushakova appeared to be actively enjoying her role as conspirator-in-chief. I have been unable to decide whether she ever believed I would really attempt an escape. It might be that all this was an intriguing exercise for the sharp wits of a woman bored by depressing camp life. Some things, even at this distance of time, I cannot answer.

The business had emerged from the abstract. This was Ushakova planning away as the radio gave us one of her favorite Tchaikovsky symphonies. "You will want a small number of the fittest and most enterprising men. You, from your extra rations, will save a quarter of a kilo of bread a day and dry it at the back of your ski shop stove and you will hide it every day. I will find some sacking to make into bags. Skins you will need for extra clothing and footwear. The soldiers trap sables and the officers shoot them. They hang them on the outer wire. The men working outside must grab one a day. No one will miss them. Plan your own way out and then head south. Wait for a night when it is snowing heavily, so that your tracks are covered."

And then, almost as an afterthought, "Colonel Ushakov will be leaving for a senior officer's course at Yakutsk shortly. I would not want anything to happen while he was in command." A very loyal wife, this Ushakova.

I sought out Makowski immediately. "We are getting out," I said. "There will be a little help for us."

"How many men will you want?"

"About half-a-dozen," I said.

"Good. We'll find them. I know one I can personally recommend."

I thought of Kolemenos. "I know one, too. We'll start rounding them up tomorrow."

"There he is now." Makowski, standing beside me at the midday break the next day, indicated a prisoner standing a little apart from the rest. "Let us wait here a couple of minutes so that you can look him over." The man's shoulders were squared and the shapeless clothes could not disguise that ramrod back.

"You are a cavalry man," said Makowski at length. "You should recognize the type."

"Who is he?"

"He's a Pole. Sergeant of Cavalry Anton Paluchowicz. He's forty-one, but strong and fit, well-trained, experienced. I'd go anywhere with him. Shall we talk to him?"

We went over and talked. I liked the look of Paluchowicz. He accepted the proposition like a good soldier undertaking a mission of war. He was glad to know I was a lieutenant of the Polish Cavalry. "We shall do it together," he said. "It won't be easy, but we shall do it."

That evening I came up behind Kolemenos. I tapped him on the shoulder and he turned. He smiled. "Oh, it's you again."

"Kolemenos, I am getting out of here with some others. Would you like to join us?"

He put one big hand on my shoulder. "You mean it? Seriously?" I nodded. "Yes, seriously. Perhaps very soon." The big man smiled happily through his blond beard. "I shall come." He laughed aloud and brought the weight of his hand down twice on my shoulder. "I could carry you on my shoulders if necessary. If we could come all that way from Irkutsk hanging on those bloody chains we can go a long way further without them."

Now there were four of us. We began to plan with a sense of urgency. It was the end of March and I felt we had not a great deal of time. We began to watch things closely. We noted, for instance, that the starting of the dog patrol around the perimeter at night was always signalled by

the yelping and whining of the sledge dogs showing their annoyance at being left behind. That signal came only once every two hours. We discovered the patrol always went round anti-clockwise, covering the long south side first. We decided the escape must be through the southerly defenses and that therefore we must get ourselves established in the end hut on that side.

Paluchowicz brought Zaro into the scheme. Eugene Zaro came from the Balkans, a Yugoslav I think. He was thirty and, before the Russians had caught up with him, had been a clerk. "If you want some fun on the way," said our sergeant, "Zaro is the man." Like an inspection committee, Makowski and Paluchowicz and I stood back and watched him in the food queue. He was a well-built man, below average height, and his almost black eyes had a constant gleam of laughter and mischief. The men around him roared in joyous gusts and Zaro stood there, his eyes twinkling in a mock-serious face. "All right," I pronounced, "we'll have him."

"I've always wanted to travel, and this sounds good," was Zaro's answer to my approach.

"It's going to be the worst trip you ever had," I told him.

"I know," he replied, "but I'm coming with you anyway." There was a pause. "The Russians have no sense of humor. It will do me good to get away from them."

So Eugene Zaro came in and we were five. And we talked about making the number up to ten so that outside we might split into two parties and take different routes to make the job of pursuit more difficult and confusing.

But it was not to be as easy as that. Two likely looking fellows I approached in the ski shop shied away even from the mention of the word escape. To talk about it was dangerous enough, in their view. To attempt it would be suicidal. They were content with their newfound riches, the daily kilo of bread and the extra tobacco. Why invite disaster and death in a crazy bid to break out? "You are probably right," I said. "It was just an idea that passed through my head."

Escaper Number Six was brought in by big Kolemenos. He was a twenty-eight-year-old Lithuanian architect named Zacharius Marchinkovas. He was tall, spare-framed, with alert brown eyes. I was impressed at

the manner in which he had already weighed the odds against us and, having found them formidable, decided that the slightest hope of success was worth the attempt. An intelligent, likeable type, this Lithuanian.

When Sergeant Paluchowicz brought into our hushed deliberations the name Schmidt, I thought this must be one of the Russo-German colony who had joined our prison train at Ufa in the Urals. These Russians with German names were the descendants of German craftsmen brought in by Peter the Great. I had read that they settled on the Volga. "Is he German?" I asked the Sergeant. "His name is Schmidt, but I do not know," was the answer. "He speaks Russian very well and easily. He stands apart from the others. He does a great deal of thinking by himself and he gives me excellent advice on everything. I recommend him to you." Makowski and I announced our intention of meeting Mr. Schmidt the next day. "I will point him out to you, then," said the Sergeant with a smile.

He was coming up to the window of the kitchen for his coffee, the last issue of the day, when Paluchowicz indicated him with a jerk of the head. Makowski and I strolled over. My first impression was that he might be too old for the rigors of the adventure we were planning. I judged him to be about fifty. He was well built, wide-shouldered and slim-waisted. His thick hair and beard were tinged with grey. He had seen us coming and, probably because the Sergeant had warned him of the meeting, showed no surprise when I spoke. "We would like to talk to you."

I spoke in Russian. He answered in Russian, "Walk towards the huts and I will join you." He moved on and we walked away.

Holding his mug of coffee, he fell in with us and, clear of the crowd, we stopped. He faced us and smiled. "Gentlemen, my name is Smith. I understand you have a proposition."

Makowski and I stood there, mouths agape. "*Smith?*" We repeated the name together.

"I am Smith, Mister Smith. I am an American." He grinned happily at our astonishment. "You are surprised, gentlemen." We just could not believe our ears. His Russian was impeccable. I could detect no trace of an accent.

"Forgive me," I said at last. "It is hard to believe. How did you get here?"

He had an easy, patient, almost professorial manner of speech. "Let me repeat, I am an American. By profession I am an engineer and was one of a number cordially invited by the Soviet Government to help build the Moscow Metro. There were about fifty of us. That was nine or ten years ago. They arrested me in 1936, convinced themselves I was a professional foreign spy and gave me twenty years." He drank off his coffee. We were still looking at him like a pair of fools. "Now I'll take my mug back and we shall walk together to the huts."

Makowski and I followed his retreating back. Poles, Ukrainians, Latvians, Estonians, Czechs, Finns, the flotsam of a European upheaval, these we expected to meet in the hands of the Russians. But an American. . . . Said Makowski, with heavy humor, "Maybe if we look around a little more we shall find some English and French." Paluchowicz came over to us. "What do you think of him?" Makowski shrugged, still following with his eyes the figure of Smith as he handed in his mug and turned to walk back. "Herr Schmidt," he told the Sergeant, "is *Mister Smith*." Paluchowicz furrowed his forehead in puzzlement. "And Mister Smith, my dear Sergeant, is an American." It was all over Paluchowicz's head. He opened his mouth to speak and then shut it.

The four of us walked slowly back to the huts and, as was the custom, exchanged sentences. That is to say, we introduced ourselves by name as Smith had done. And he, in accordance with camp etiquette, asked us in turn, "How long are you in for?" This question always had its place in first meetings. It was a form of introduction.

By now, the beginning of April, Makowski and I had got ourselves bunks near the door of the end hut. Kolemenos had also managed the switch and the others hoped to join us within a few days. Telling the Sergeant we would see him later, we invited Mister Smith into our hut. Sitting on Makowski's bottom bunk, I cautiously outlined our plans. I told him I had sound reasons for believing that only the long road south held any chance of success, although some of the others were still reluctant to drop the idea of the short route east to Kamchatka.

He did not rush to answer. He asked a few shrewd questions. We sat silent as he thought things over. And then, "Gentlemen, it will be a privilege to join you. I agree that the south route is the best. You can count on me."

We sat long with Smith. All our histories, our Russian dossiers, followed a similar pattern. Smith was different. He was the odd man out, and he intrigued us. He told us much, but neither then nor ever did he tell us his Christian name. Later, when we six Europeans addressed one another familiarly by first names, the American was always, as he first introduced himself, Mister Smith to us all, the "Mister" somehow being accepted as a substitute for the name we were never told.

In a Moscow obsessed between the wars with its Five-Year Plans, Smith and his friends, installed in well-appointed flats and with money to spare to buy luxuries in those shops where the entry permit was either a Party membership card or a foreign passport, must have been conspicuous. Smith had a car and travelled around freely—a circumstance which must have earned him an underlined report in secret police records. He had a Russian girlfriend; the police would not have liked that, either. But they let him go on, working hard and playing hard.

"I never saw the blow coming," he went on. "After a year's work, the Russians, without any move from me, doubled my salary, which had been fixed by contract, to show their appreciation of the steady progress that was being made with the work. From then on I thought I was well in with them."

Smith was in his flat with the girl after midnight one night in 1936 when the NKVD called in force. They were quiet, determined, and most efficient. Smith and the girl were both arrested. He never saw her again. Other occupants of the flats probably never saw or heard a thing. When dawn came Smith was occupying a cell in the Lubyanka—it was to be his home for the next six months. Repeatedly they brushed aside his demands to be allowed to see someone from the United States Embassy.

The others readily accepted the seventh and last recruit to the party. There was the practical consideration that he would be useful when we got to the English-speaking world. And Zaro told him, "I would like to go to America when we are free." Said Smith, "I would like to have you all come to America."

I told Ushakova that I had found six friends. She did not ask me who they were and I do not think she wanted to know. She handed over to me a gift that was to be of inestimable value—an axehead. "That will be on

my conscience all my life," she said. "It is the first thing I have ever stolen." I made a handle for it and Kolemenos wore it for safekeeping inside the back waistband of his trousers.

One other priceless article I made in the ski shop was a fine three-inch-wide and foot-long knife. It was originally a section of broken saw blade which I heated in the workshop stove, hammered into shape, and ground on the grindstone. The handle was two pieces of shaped wood tightly thonged together by long strips of deerskin. As Kolemenos became the keeper of the axe, so did I take over the custody of the knife. These were perilous possessions inside the camp. The discovery of either would have wrecked the whole scheme.

The word reached us that in a week's time it would be Easter Sunday. It fell in 1941 on 13 April, I have since discovered. The Sunday before, 6 April, marked the end of our preparations. Our escape wardrobe was then complete with the making of seven balaclava caps of fur with an extension flap down the back which could be tucked into the neck of our jackets. We were all tense and ready to go, worried about our valuable new possessions—the skins, the axe, the knife, the store of dehydrated bread—and fearful that at this point some of them might be stolen.

And on that day Ushakova sent for me and said, "My husband has gone to Yakutsk. That is why he did not attend the parade today. I have made seven bags out of provision sacks. You will have to take them out one at a time." She was perfectly calm. My heart was hammering with anxiety. When she handed me the first of these bags I saw that she had provisioned it, too, and I wondered how possibly we could hide it. I tucked the bag under my arm inside my jacket, stuck my hands in the deep pockets and walked back to the prisoners' lines hunched up and bending over like a man in deep thought. Six times more in the next few days I made that hazardous trip, knowing each time that if any Russian discovered what I was carrying disaster would be sudden and complete. We made pillows of them, covering them with bits of animal skin and moss, and every hour that we were away from the hut we sweated in apprehension.

We watched the weather, so essential a part of our escape plan. We wanted snow, big-flaked, heavy-falling snow, to screen our movements. Monday was cold and clear. On Tuesday there was wind-driven, icy sleet.

Mid-morning on Wednesday a lead-grey and lowering sky gave us the boon we sought. The snow thickened as the day went on. It began to pile up round the untrodden no-man's-land between us and the wire. At the midday break the seven of us met briefly. The word went round. "This is the day."

Back in Hut Number One the men were beginning to settle for the night. Smith and Zaro, in the bunk nearest the door, were to give us the starting signal. We all broke up and climbed onto our bunks and lay there. Six of us lay wide awake and waiting, but big Kolemenos in the bunk below me was gently snoring.

Smith tapped my shoulder. "Now," he whispered. Gently I shook Kolemenos. "Now," I repeated.

We swung our bags off the bunks by the rawhide straps which we had fitted for slinging them across our backs. We piled the moss coverings back in pillow form at the head of the beds. "Everybody well?" I whispered. From all around me came the hissed answer, "Yes." "Anybody changed his mind?" There was no reply. Said Makowski, "Let's go."

I dropped my bag near the door and stepped outside. The camp was silent. It was snowing as heavily as ever. I could not see the nearest wire. In the southeast guard tower, our nearest danger, they could not have had twenty yards visibility. We could be thankful that in this place of no piped water supply and no electricity, there were no searchlights to menace us.

The inner wire was a hundred yards from the hut door and the success of the first part of the operation depended on the observation that the frost-stiffened coils did not faithfully follow the contours of the ground. There was a dip in the ground straight ahead of us which we reckoned would provide a couple of feet of clearance if we burrowed through the snow and under the wire.

We went out one by one with about a minute's interval between each. Zaro went first and I prayed he found the right spot at the first attempt. Then the Lithuanian. Then Mister Smith. Then Makowski and Paluchowicz. Kolemenos turned and whispered to me, "I hope they've made a

bloody great hole for me to get through." I watched him run off into the night like the others, carrying his bag in front of him, ready, according to plan, to shove it through the gap ahead of him. Then it was my turn, and the palms of my hands were moist with sweat. I took a last swift look round. The men in the hut were sleeping on. I turned and bolted.

When I reached the wire Smith was under it and slowly wriggling forward. Two were through. The rest of us crouched down and waited. Agonizing minutes passed as first the Sergeant and then Makowski squirmed and grunted, bellies flat pressed against the earth, under the wire. The big bulk of Kolemenos went head first into the gap and I held my breath. He was halfway through when the barbs took hold on the back of his jacket between the shoulder blades. He shook himself gently and little pieces of ice tinkled musically down the coils of the wire.

"Lie still, Anastazi," I hissed. "Don't move at all." Someone on the other side had pulled his bag through and was reaching through over his neck to try to release him. The minutes ticked by. Kolemenos lay very still as the hand worked over between his shoulders. Someone spoke on the other side and the big man went forward again. I let my breath out in a long sigh and followed through. The first obstacle was behind us. It had taken a full twenty minutes.

We looked across to the loom of the first tall wooden fence as Kolemenos slithered in and braced himself against the steep-sloping near side. We used him as a human stepping-stone, and as we clambered over him he took our feet in his linked and cupped hands and heaved us one by one onto the ledge at the base of the twelve-foot palisade. More vital minutes were lost in pulling Kolemenos out of the ditch. By standing on his shoulders and reaching out at full stretch, we were able to haul ourselves over the top and, standing on the lateral securing timber on the other side, lean over and help up the later arrivals.

Anchor-man Kolemenos again posed us a problem. Straddling the top of the fence, our legs held firm, Makowski and I leaned head downwards and arms outstretched to haul at him, one arm each. Three times we got his fingers to within inches of the top and three times we had to lower him down again. We paused, trembling with exertion and near-despair, and tried again. His fingers scrabbled for a hold on the top, gripped. To

our straining he began to add his own tremendous strength. He came up, up and over.

To beat the coiled wire at the foot of the fence we threw ourselves outwards, landing in a heap in the deep snow. One or two failed to leap quite clear and were scratched as they pulled themselves away. We were in the patrol alley now between the two fences and time was running out. If I had heard the sound of the sledge dogs announcing the start of a patrol now, I think I might have been physically sick.

We ran the few yards to the outer fence and this time shoved Kolemenos up first. We were probably making little noise, but it seemed to me the commotion was deafening. This time I was last up and it was Kolemenos who swung me up and over. In a final mad scramble we leapt and tumbled over the last lot of barbed wire at the foot of the outer fence, picked ourselves up, breathlessly inquired if everyone was all right, and, with one accord, started to run.

We gasped and choked and wheezed, but we ran and kept running, into the great forest among the looming, white-clothed trees. We ran south, with the camp at our backs. One and then another stumbled, fell, and were helped to their feet. The first headlong rush slowed to a steady, racking lope. We jogged along for hours, into the dawn and beyond it to another snow-filled day, our packs bumping and pounding our backs as we went. When we stopped to draw air into laboring lungs, I made them start again. And I made them struggle on until about 11 a.m. when hardly one of us could have moved another pace. We looked round at one another. Paluchowicz was bent over double with his hands on his knees, his shoulders heaving, fighting to get his breath back. Two of the others were squatting on their haunches in the snow. All of us were open-mouthed with wagging tongues like spent animals.

The snow still came down, thinning a little now, and there was a moaning wind through the trees that made the gaunt branches shake and creak miserably. Like hunted animals we were all straining our ears for sounds of the chase. In all our minds was the thought of the dogs. But there was only the wind, the falling snow, and the stirring trees.

Up the slope to our left the trees grew more closely together. "We will get up there," I said, finally. "There is more shelter and we shall be better

hidden." There were groans of protest. Smith joined in, "Rawicz is right." So we labored our way out of the hollow and picked on the broad base of a great tree as the location of our shelter. We scooped the snow away down to the tree roots and cleared a space a couple of yards square. We built up the snow around into a solid low wall. Kolemenos cut branches with his axe and we laid them on top in a close mesh, piling on more snow to complete the roof. It was a lesson we had learned the hard way in Siberia: Get out of the wind, because the wind is the killer.

We slept through the remaining few hours of daylight, only one man remaining awake at a time to keep a listening guard near the small opening. All seven of us knew it was imperative that we should get clear out of the camp area as soon as possible. All through that second night we alternately ran and walked. Near morning we crossed a frozen stream, steeply banked on the other side, and when we scrambled up and got away from it into the continuing forest, we made our camp.

For the first four or five days we stuck to this night movement and daylight holing up. There was no sign of pursuit. Hopefully, we decided that, our tracks having been well covered by the first night's snow, the hunt had probably been organized eastward as being the shortest and most feasible escape route. Cautiously we congratulated ourselves on the choice of the flight to the south. We started to travel by day, advancing roughly abreast in a spread-out formation and making up to thirty miles a day. It was a time of hardship, of a constant battle against cold and fatigue, but our spirits were high. Most of all at this time we wanted to be able to light a fire and we spurred ourselves on with the promise that we should have one as soon as we sighted the Lena.

After about a week of travel we began to sort ourselves out. The two regular soldiers, Makowski and Paluchowicz, kept close together. Marchinkovas, reserved and serious, but with an occasional unexpected dry wit, was befriended by Kolemenos. Smith, now completely accepted as a kind of elder counsellor of the party, was my own particular companion. The buoyant, fun-loving Zaro was impartially friendly with everyone and moved happily from group to group. A rare fellow, this Zaro. I saw him, at the end of a gruelling day when we had to flog our aching muscles for the energy to build the night's hide-out, mocking at his own and our

weariness by squatting down in the snow, hands on hips, and giving us a lively version of a Russian dance until Kolemenos was bellowing with laughter, tears running down into his beard. Nothing could ever daunt Zaro. Of all the gallant jokers I had met, Zaro was undoubtedly the greatest. He taught us all that the grimmest twists of life were not entirely humorless.

And so, in the half-light of the day's beginning we silently crossed the Lena, mightiest river in this country of many great rivers, and came to the steep bank on the far side. There for some minutes we stood, looking back across the ice. Some of the tension of the past weeks was already falling away from us. In all our minds had been the idea we might never reach the Lena, but here we were, safe and unmolested. We could face the next stage with fresh confidence.

Inconsequentially someone started to talk about fish. It set me on a train of thought and memory. I told the others that in winter in Poland it was possible to catch fish by hammering a hole through the ice.

"And having made the hole," interjected Zaro, "what do we do next—whistle them up?" No, I explained, the fish, stunned by the hammering, will be forced out through the change of air pressure when the ice is broken through. The others laughed and bantered, congratulating me on my ability as a teller of tall tales. "All right then," I said, "let's try it." Kolemenos went off and returned with a solid balk of timber and we walked out about twenty yards onto the river ice and started thumping away with pile-driver blows. The water gushed up like a geyser, swirling icily round our feet. And yes! There were fish—four of them, about the size of herrings. We swooped on them and picked them up. We were as excited as schoolboys. The others crowded round me, slapping my back, and Zaro made a little speech of apology for having doubted my word. Then Smith, looking anxiously around, said we had better not play our luck too hard and should get moving under cover again. We had a drink of the cold, clean Lena water and moved off.

On about the third day we were enveloped in an early morning ground mist as we started out. We abandoned for once our practice of advance

in extended line and pushed on through the mist in a bunch. Somebody hissed urgently for silence. We stopped dead and listened.

Ahead of us and quite near came a shuddering, deep-throated cough, a violent thumping on the ground, and a succession of crashing noises as though some heavy body were hurling itself towards us through the undergrowth. We stood as still as a collection of statues. Then I reached down for the knife, Kolemenos swung his axe up to his shoulder, and the others purposefully swung their cudgels. The furious commotion stopped. We waited a full minute, straining our ears. Faintly came the sound of choked, labored breathing. Another minute went by. The uproar exploded again and we felt the vibrations as the earth was pounded.

Through the mist a few yards away I saw an animal bulk thrashing convulsively from side to side, its head down and hidden from me. I made the remaining short distance at a crouched run. The others came up fast behind me. There, kicking, snorting, and struggling, its muzzle flecked with spume and its breath pumping out steamily to join the morning's white mist, was a full-grown male deer. But it was trapped and could not run. The fine spread of antlers was locked fast in the tangled roots of a fallen tree.

Kolemenos walked softly round the deer. He stepped up onto the trunk of the fallen tree, balanced himself expertly and swung the shining axe blade down with a vicious swish. The edge struck home where the back joined the neck and the deer slumped, quite dead. Kolemenos jerked his axe free, wiped the blade on his leggings. We all ran forward and unitedly tried to get the head of the animal free. Kolemenos got his shoulders under the roots and heaved upwards, but even he could not release the antlers, and eventually he brought his axe out again and hacked the head from the body. We hauled the carcass into a clear space and I cut it open and carefully skinned it.

Within an hour we had choice cuts of venison grilling on a wooden spit over a flame.

The weeks slipped by into the middle of May and we noted gratefully the first signs of the short Siberian spring. The wind was milder; there were a

few buds on the trees. Overhead we heard the beat of wings and looked up to see geese and ducks flying to their summer feeding and breeding places. The streams we crossed were still frozen hard and the carpet of snow lay undisturbed, but conditions generally were easier and we felt the worst climatic hardships were behind us.

The last thing we wanted was to meet other men and in this our luck held. We crossed the very occasional roads only after thorough reconnaissance. There were nights when we saw afar the lights of a village or small township. There were days when we saw the faraway outlines of buildings and tall chimneys plumed with white smoke. In these areas we proceeded with extra caution.

We came to a high point from which we could look down into a valley and we decided excitedly this must be the beginning of Lake Baikal. Late in the afternoon we huddled together to make plans for the next immediate stage of the journey. Common sense dictated that to hug the lake verge too closely was to invite discovery by inhabitants of the fishing villages or semi-industrial townships, well spaced here in the north but clustering thicker together on the southern side towards the sizable cities within reach of the Trans-Siberian Railway. The proposal we all approved, therefore, was to bear away north and make our way clear of roads and towns on a course parallel with but safely distant from the lake. We accordingly set off obliquely northeast, aiming to cross the road again farther along.

Over to my right Zaro gave the halt and alert signal with upraised arm. I repeated the signal and the advancing line straggled to a stop. Zaro pointed urgently in the direction of the river. I saw something moving between the trees. I went over to Zaro and asked him what he thought he had seen. Zaro said, "It might be a man. Whatever it is, it acts as though it had seen us and is trying to hide." The others crept up to us. "If it's a man," said Makowski, "we shall have to hit him on the head and throw him in the river. We can't risk anyone giving us away." We spread out again, Smith and Zaro on my left, Paluchowicz, Makowski, Marchinkovas and Kolemenos on my right. Suddenly a figure which had been motionless behind a tree trunk threw itself forward and downward into a clump of bushes. And from beneath the bush came terrified, heart-broken sobbing.

We looked at one another in sudden embarrassment. Someone whispered in awed tones, "It must be a woman."

Kolemenos bent down, shouldered aside the bush, and gently lifted. We all crowded round. It was a girl—a slip of a girl, round-eyed with fright, her tears making clean rivulets through the grime of her face. A few moments ago we had been a bunch of desperate men who could contemplate killing to prevent discovery. Now we stood around, clumsily contrite, like a crowd of romping boys caught in mischief and seeking the words to repair some act of over-rough horseplay. Through her tears she stole a look at my face and cowered back. "Don't be afraid of us," I said in Russian. She looked at me again and her eyes went from me to the other six solemn and anxious bearded faces. She went on crying and I cannot blame her; we must have looked the worst gang of desperadoes she had ever had the ill-luck to meet.

"Please don't cry, little girl," said Sergeant Paluchowicz.

She was still very frightened. She was fighting hard to stop her sobbing. "We won't hurt you," I tried to console her. "We all have sisters and sweethearts of our own." The others nodded agreement.

Everything she wore seemed too big and bulky for her. Like our own, both garments were of some somber black, heavy material. Beneath the jacket showed the upper half of a well-worn and dirty purple velvet dress, the skirt of which was tucked into the trousers. Her tear-brimming eyes were very blue. Wisps of chestnut hair strayed out from under a moth-eaten fur hood. She looked like a schoolgirl masquerading in the clothes of a grown man. And because she looked so helpless we stood around silently and waited for her to dry her tears and speak. We were tongue-tied.

She lifted her hands to draw the jacket sleeves across her face and I saw she was holding a little crucifix. She dropped her hands, looked down at her feet and turned her eyes on me. She spoke then, in a quaint mixture of Polish and halting Russian. "I have lost my way to the farm where I work. I am Polish and I was deported here to work." The look she gave us was apprehensive.

Paluchowicz and Makowski pushed forward. I talked and they talked in a rush at the same time. In the gabble of explanation she finally

understood we were telling her that we were Poles, too, that we were escaping prisoners, and that she had nothing to fear. Impulsively she flung herself into my arms and cried her relief and sudden happiness. Over and over again she repeated, "God is good to me." The other two Poles awkwardly patted her head and shoulders.

It was an emotional scene. Too emotional and noisy for one cool head in the party. Smith had moved apart and had been keeping an anxious watch. In Russian he called out, "Break it up. Are you forgetting where we are? For God's sake let's get under cover."

The group quickly broke up. We moved off to find a hiding place.

Her name was Kristina Polanska. She was just seventeen. She had not eaten for two days and she was very, very hungry. We rummaged in our bags and handed her our scraps of food. She ate like a half-starved animal, with absorbed concentration, now and again sniffling and rubbing her padded sleeve across her nose. She fascinated us. We squatted on our haunches and never took our eyes off her. Only Mister Smith sat back a little, watching her, too, but with a more detached air of appraisal. Then she stopped eating and told us her name.

"I am not lost from the *kolhoz*," she volunteered. "I ran away. I have been running for many days." She paused. "And you are the first gentlemen I have met since I left my home." She put a lot of emphasis into the word gentlemen.

"Where was your home, Kristina?" I asked.

"My father had a farm near Luck, in the Polish Ukraine," she said. "I last saw it in 1939. I have no home now."

Quietly the American interposed with a question about our immediate plans. It was getting dark, he pointed out, and he thought we should make some distance along the river bank northwards to a point which looked favorable for a crossing early the next day. He suggested it would be senseless to give ourselves another soaking that night. At least we could sleep dry.

There was no argument. We walked for four or five miles along the tree-fringed river. I saw the girl several times looking at Smith. She did

not speak to him. I think she sensed that in this calm and thoughtful man was the only likely opposition to her presence among us. We Poles talked to her. Smith said nothing.

It was quite dark when we found a place to rest. We built a hide against a fallen log. We laid down our food sacks for her and she curled up among us, completely trustful, and slept. Ours was a more fitful rest. Throughout the dark hours we took sentry duty in turn, according to our practice. She slept on like a tired child, oblivious of the chill of the night. She still had not awakened when, in the first hint of day, Mister Smith touched me on the shoulder and beckoned me away from the group.

He came to the point at once. "What are we going to do with this young woman, Slav?" I had known it was coming and I did not know what to say. It might be a good thing, I said, to find out from her what were her plans. It was evading the question and I was well aware of it. Out of the tail of my eye I saw Makowski talking to Paluchowicz. They strolled over to us. On their heels came Kolemenos. A minute later the other two left the hide and joined us. "Very well," said the American, "we'll make it a full conference." We talked, but we did not come to the point. Were we going to take the girl with us? That was the only question. The only result of our talk was that we would talk to Kristina and reach some decision afterwards.

We woke her gently. She yawned and stretched. She sat up and looked at us all. She smiled in real happiness to see us. We grinned back through our beards and basked in that rare smile. Busily we fussed around to rake out some food and we all quietly breakfasted together as day began to break. Paluchowicz, clearing his throat embarrassedly, asked her then how she came to be where we found her and where she was heading.

"I was trying to get to Irkutsk," she said, "because a man who gave me a lift on a farm lorry and was sorry for me told me that if I got to the big railway junction there I might steal a ride on a train going west. He dropped me on the road a few miles away and I was trying to find a way round the town."

Her glance rested on the American. He returned the look gravely. Her fingers fluttered to the strands of hair straying outside her cap, and tucked them away in a gesture pathetically and engagingly feminine. "I think I should tell you about myself," she said. We nodded.

It was a variation of a story we all knew. The prison camps were filled with men who could tell of similar experiences. The location and the details might differ, but the horror and the leaden misery were common ingredients and stemmed from the same authorship.

After the First World War Kristina Polanska's father had been rewarded for his war services by a grant of land in the Ukraine under the reorganization of Central European territory. He had fought against the Bolsheviks, and General Pilsudski was thus able to give a practical expression of Polish gratitude. The girl was an only child. They were a hard-working couple, these parents, and they intended that Kristina should have every advantage their industry could provide. In 1939 she was attending high school in Luck and the Polanskas were well pleased with the progress she was making.

Came September 1939. The Russians started moving in. Ahead of the Red Army "Liberators" the news of their coming reached the Ukrainian farm workers. The well-organized Communist underground was ready. It needed only a few inflammatory speeches on the theme of the overthrow of foreign landowners and restoration of the land to the workers, and the Ukrainian peasants were transformed into killer mobs. The Polanskas knew their position was desperate. They knew the mob would come for them. They hid Kristina in a loft and waited. "Whatever happens, stay there until we come back for you," said her mother.

She heard the arrival of the mob, the shouts of men, the sounds of destruction as hammers and axes were swung in a wrecking orgy among the equipment in the surrounding farm buildings. Kristina stayed in the loft for what seemed like hours but she thought perhaps it was not really very long. Kristina crept down through the silent house and into the yard. The men had gone. Polanska and his wife lay dead in the yard, close against the side of the house. She crept to them and looked upon them for the last time. They had been beaten and then strangled with barbed wire.

She did not remember the next few days in detail. Some compassionate people in villages she passed through gave her a night's shelter and some food. She was obsessed with the idea of having to keep ahead of the Russians and out of their hands. Ironically they caught her in the act of crossing the border when she did not even know she was near it. The Red

Army handed her over to a civilian court which swiftly sentenced her to be deported to Russia as a collective farm worker in the Yenisei River area of Western Siberia.

More vividly she described her life on the Soviet farm. The farm was controlled by a foreman. Kristina was frightened of him and tried always to keep out of his way. He was a big fellow, she said, tall, swarthy, and powerful. He would occasionally seek out the girl and try out some heavy pleasantries, tell her how different she was from the Russian women and that she needed someone to look after her.

There came the day when she was told she would report to the foreman's house "for interrogation." His intentions were obvious from the start. He promised there would be no more heavy work for her if she were kind to him. Kristina panicked, and appealed to him to let her go. What followed was a plain attempt at rape. She screamed, clawed at his face, and frenziedly kicked out with her heavy boots. Surprised at the fury of her resistance, he relaxed his hold just long enough for her to break away and bolt. He called vile names after her and threatened that he had means to make her change her mind.

She waited until the light began to fade in the afternoon, expecting all the time that he would come for her, but he did not show up. She slipped out, keeping the *kolhoz* buildings between her and the foreman's house, and ran. She slept that night in reeds by a river, and after following the river along for many miles the next day, finally reached a road, and was given the first of two long lifts eastwards by drivers of big farm lorries.

"All Russians are not bad," said Kristina. "These two were sorry for me and gave me some of their bread to eat. The second one told me to try to get to Irkutsk, but he could not take me any further."

She looked round at us all and her eyes finally rested on Mister Smith. "So that is how I came to be here," she added.

The American dug his hands into his *fufaika* pockets. He spoke levelly. "We are not going anywhere near Irkutsk; we are heading south around the other side of the lake. What are you going to do now?"

Kristina looked surprised and taken aback. She turned an appealing gaze on the other six of us. We said nothing. We knew what we wanted but were content to let Mister Smith handle this his own way. Her lips

trembled slightly. Then she jutted out her little chin. "I am coming with you. You can't leave me on my own."

The American looked over her head for some moments at the river beyond. "Can you swim?"

"I swim very well," she said, and there was no mistaking the note of pride. "In school I was a very good swimmer."

Through Mister Smith's grey-streaked beard came the flash of a smile. We relaxed as we heard him tell her, "Forgive me, child, if my questions have seemed to be abrupt. We just thought you might have plans of your own. All we can offer you is a lot of hardship. Our food has run very low and we have a great distance to travel. You must consider, too, that if you are caught with us you will not get off so lightly as you would if you remained on your own. If you want to join us, however, we accept you completely."

"Thank you," replied Kristina simply. "The only thing I wanted was to be with you."

The girl went away from us then into a screen of bushes and in her absence I called for a check on food. We decided on strict rationing to one small meal a day until we could replenish our stocks. The only item still in plentiful supply was the *gubka* moss for fire-lighting. At least we had the means of warmth.

We ate hurriedly there that morning and decided to make an immediate river crossing. This first hour of daylight gave promise of a fine spring day and we had a common desire to make distance fast and to return as soon as possible to a straight course to the south.

For the girl this first river was a new ordeal. We persuaded her to take off her warm jacket, trousers, and boots. I had a moment of great pity for her as she stood with us in the shelter of the trees in her faded purple dress. I went carefully out to the edge of the ice with the line paying out behind me, the axe stuck firmly in the back waistband of my trousers, and I made it fairly quickly across the open channel to the other side. Kolemenos crossed, holding her rolled-up clothes, with some difficulty, above water. Paluchowicz and Makowski came over together, the girl behind them with the bight of a length of spare line about her, the ends held by the two Poles. The other three followed, one of them bringing the girl's boots. We ran for cover, winding in the line as we went.

Kristina was blue with cold and she could not stop her teeth chattering. Kolemenos handed her her clothes. "Don't stand still, child," the American told her. "Run off from us now and take that dress off. Wring it out quickly, wipe off the water as much as you can, and jump into your dry trousers and *fufaika*." She nodded and ran. We stripped off, danced around, wringing out our garments as we did so. The operation did not take long and in our wet rags we waited a few minutes for the girl to rejoin us. She came running, with her dress and underwear under her arm in a soggy bundle.

"Did you see? I *can* swim, can't I?"

Mister Smith grinned. "Yes. I saw." And, aside to me, "The little lady is not going to be much trouble, after all."

She grew on us until there was not one of the bunch who would not cheerfully have died to protect her.

At this stage of the journey I knew we must be within a week's travel of the border. The knowledge made us edgy, silent, and exaggeratedly watchful. We spent up to an hour scouting the position ahead before crossing a stretch of open ground or one of the many shallow streams across our route, despite the fact that the chance of discovery at night must have been remote. I had the feeling that we were moving among hostile people and that the odds were that we must at some time run into some of them. More imminently than the frontier I feared the crossing of the Trans-Siberian Railway. Already we were near enough to have heard in the far distance the passing of trains. Mister Smith shared my fears.

"The railway will be heavily patrolled," he said anxiously.

"We will cross at night," I replied.

It was difficult to sleep during the day. There was no need to post sentries. Everybody was alert. Only Kristina seemed to enjoy peace of mind. Her trust in us was absolute. She slept while we worried and, knowing that the trail must become progressively more arduous, I was glad to see it. She was vastly entertained one early morning to see in the distance a train of camels, loaded with cotton, moving slowly on their way less than two miles away from our hiding-place on a scrub-covered ridge. She had

never seen camels before. Commented Zaro, "From reindeer to camels—now I have seen everything."

From high ground we saw the Trans-Siberian Railway through the clear air of a June morning five miles distant from us. Lying near the track and separated by four or five miles were two small villages; on the outskirts of each, hard against the side of the tracks, was a signalman's or maintenance man's stone house. All day long we watched. Several long trains passed in both directions. About midday a Red Cross train steamed west. An hour or so later a heavy freight train chugged from the east and we nudged each other at the sight of the heavy guns it was carrying on low-slung bogies.

The advance towards the railway was made immediately after dark, with Paluchowicz and Makowski out on each flank as a special security patrol. The girl stayed close beside Smith while Kolemenos, Marchinkovas, Zaro, and I fanned out a few yards ahead. It took us about an hour and a half to reach the screen of trees and we waited squatting on our haunches there for the two Poles on the flanks to edge their way into us. They had seen nothing suspicious, they reported.

"Come on," I jerked my arm, jumped to my feet, and leapt forward, taking Kristina with me by the elbow. There was an agitated scramble down the embankment on the far side; then we were running like crazy fools. We had covered about a hundred yards when someone shouted, his voice sharp with panic, "Down, down!" I glanced over my shoulder and saw the lights of a passenger train. I dropped, pulling the girl down with me. We all went down and hugged the ground as the train thundered by. It had been a near thing. If anyone on the train had seen us I am quite sure we should have been ruthlessly hunted down.

The morning found us after hours of hard travel basking in sunshine on the secluded bank of a clear-water river. It teemed with fish, but we might as well have been onlookers at an aquarium because we knew no way of catching them. We lay about for a while and then Smith said he thought it better if we got over to the other side as soon as possible. Unlike the rivers of the Baikal Range, the waters of this one moved slowly and were warm. The swim across was pleasantly refreshing.

The country on the south side of the river was fairly flat and gave us good cover. It was criss-crossed by shallow streams and it was at one of these a couple of mornings later that Kristina suddenly said, "I would like to wash my clothes." We all agreed it was an excellent idea. Kristina walked away from us down the stream carrying her shoes and splashing her feet in the water until she disappeared from sight. We stripped off and started our laundering. All of us were infested with lice and I derived a savage pleasure from holding my clothes under the rippling stream in the hope I could reduce the army of parasites which had lived on me for all these months. We beat our clothes with stones and then trod some of the filth out of them. A couple of hours passed while the sun dried our clothes as we washed ourselves and stretched out naked in the long grass. With a shock we heard the girl call a warning of her approach and dived for our trousers and just managed to scramble into them as she appeared.

Kristina looked as though she had been scrubbing herself. Her face was shining. She had been doing something to her hair, too. The chestnut tints glinted in the sun. She had contrived to persuade it into some kind of order and had carefully plaited the long ends. Keeping a straight face and holding herself erect like a dowager at a tea-party she greeted us. "Good afternoon, gentlemen. Were you expecting me?" We all laughed at that and completed our dressing. And Mister Smith went away and picked a small posy of some pink flowers and gravely handed them to her. "You look beautiful, my child," he told her. Kristina smiled radiantly. It must have been one of her happiest days.

We were very near the border when we ran into the two Buryat Mongols. There was no avoiding the meeting. We saw one another at the same moment at a distance of not more than fifty yards and there was nothing to do but continue towards the pair. One was middle-aged, if one can judge the ages of these people; the other was definitely a young man. They could have been father and son. They stopped and waited for us to come up to them and grinned widely and nodded their heads. They bowed together as we came to a halt.

The conversation was embroidered and ornamented with politenesses and I took the pattern from them. They spoke slowly in Russian.

They inquired solicitously whether our feet carried us well in our travels. I assured them our feet had carried us well and returned the inquiry. The older man was naively curious to know about us.

"Where do you come from?"

"From the North—Yakutsk."

"And where do you travel to?"

"We travel very far to the South."

The old man looked shrewdly at me from beneath his wrinkled lids. "You go perhaps to Lhasa to pray."

I thought that an excellent idea. "Yes," I replied.

But the old man hadn't finished. He looked us over carefully. "Why do you have the woman with you?"

A bit of quick thinking here. "She has relatives who live on our way and we have promised to deliver her there."

The two Mongols exchanged smiling glances as though approving of our protection for the girl on her journey. They both dug their hands in their deep pockets and brought them into view clutching fistfuls of peanuts which they cheerfully handed round.

Each in turn wished us that our feet carried us well and safely to our destination. They turned away together and walked from us. We waited to see them out of sight. They had gone only a few yards when the old man turned back alone. He walked straight up to Kristina, bowed, and gave her a handful of peanuts for herself. He repeated his good wishes to her and to us all and left us beaming goodwill.

When they had gone we set off at a fast pace. We were too near the frontier to take chances now.

Phase one of the escape ended with the crossing of the Russo-Mongolian border at the end of the second week in June. It was notable for two circumstances—the ease of the crossing and the fact that we stepped out of the Buryat Mongolian Autonomous Republic of the Eastern Siberian Region of the USSR with nearly a hundredweight of small early potatoes pulled out of a field only a few hours from the frontier. The timing of the potato field raid—at dawn on the day in which later we

were to make our exit from Siberia—was particularly gratifying. I felt that, having gone into captivity with nothing, we were leaving with a valuable parting gift, even though the donors were unconscious of their generosity.

We reached the crossing point in late afternoon when dusk was deepened to premature darkness by massing black clouds heavy with rain. Far-off thunder rumbled like the uneasy mutterings of a troubled giant. The air was still, the atmosphere hot and oppressive. As far as the eye could see nothing moved. There was nothing to challenge our progress. The dividing line was marked by a nine-foot-tall red post surmounted by a round metal sign carrying the Soviet hammer and sickle emblem over a strip of Cyrillic initials. To east and west one more post was visible in each direction, so spaced in accordance with the contours of the country that an observer at any one post could always see two others.

I stepped round the post to see what might be inscribed on the other side of the plaque, but the reverse was blank. There was sudden laughter as Zaro called out, "What's it like in Mongolia, Slav?" He cavorted across to me with a hop, skip, and a jump. The others followed with a rush. We pranced and danced, slapped one another on the back, pulled beards, and shook hands. Kristina ran round, kissed each one of us in turn, and cried with happiness and excitement. Mister Smith put a stop to the noisy rejoicings by pointedly swinging his potato-filled food sack onto his back and moving off. We ran after him, still laughing.

"Let's get away from this place," he said, "as fast as we can go. We can't be sure how far below this border Russian influence extends. We don't know where we are and we don't know where we are going."

We walked fast after that, our sacks bumping against our backs. Behind us the frontier markers were swallowed into the distance and the darkness. The American had started a train of serious thought. I estimated we had covered 2,000 kilometers—about 1,200 miles—in not much more than sixty days. It was a feat of speed as well as endurance.

Paluchowicz broke in on my thoughts. "How far do we have to travel now?"

I thought about it. "About twice as far as we've travelled already," I guessed. Paluchowicz grunted his dismay.

Here it was that we first discussed seriously where we were going. Up to now we had thought ahead no further than the escape from Siberia. Back in the camp I had talked, without any great conviction, of making for Afghanistan. It sounded like a safe, out-of-the-way small country where we might be received without too many questions asked. Now we began to turn our thoughts towards India. And the key to this, I think, lay in the talk we had a day earlier with the two Mongols. Lhasa. It was a word we could use in a country where few knew our language, a sound which could be understood and would always evoke the response of a flung-out hand to indicate direction. We talked mainly of Tibet in that first hour. India then seemed too far to contemplate.

This country, we discovered, was criss-crossed with rivers, but we marched a couple of days before we struck the first one. At noon on a sun-scorched day, through a shimmering heat-haze, the promise of its cool waters sent our dragging feet lifting over the dry ground. It was a beautiful sight, about a hundred yards wide, its banks green-clothed with grass, its verges supporting flourishing growths of the long-stemmed, bamboo-jointed tall water plants we had met all through Siberia. We lay on our bellies and drank and then we sat in bliss soaking our aching feet. We washed ourselves, using fine sand as a scourer, and soaked the dust out of our clothes. We baked and ate some more of our potatoes, and lay down in the grass with a sense of relaxed well-being.

Along the river an hour after our arrival came a small sampan-type boat, high-built at bows and stern, broad-bottomed and with a flimsy canopy amidships. There were many other boats on many other rivers in Outer Mongolia, but the men who plied their trade in them were always Chinese. On the roads I never once met a Chinese. Road travellers seemed always to be Mongols.

By the end of our first fortnight in Mongolia our methods of advance had been modified from those employed in Siberia. No longer was it necessary to post night sentries. The urge to keep on the move persisted; it had become a habit of our existence. But we were not now bedevilled by fears of imminent recapture; we could make contact with the people of the country, and we could ask for food or work for food. We did long day marches from the cool hour before dawn until the late evening setting of

the sun, but we had adopted the hot country custom of resting in shelter for the two hours of fiercest heat at midday.

The country ahead presented a prospect of a series of round-topped low hills which we skirted when we could and surmounted when we had to. The population was sparse and the villages, sited near water, were widely separated. A very small part of the vast land through which we travelled was cultivated.

Our first thought on reaching the crest of a hill was always to look for the next river. This Outer Mongolian journey was in essence a succession of forced marches through great heat from water to water. Streams and rivers meant solace for the feet, water to slake thirst, water to bathe in. The navigable waterways, too, brought us food on a few occasions, and the incidents, not unnaturally, remain in my mind.

The first time we struck lucky was when we came across a laden sampan held fast on a mudbank. The boatman jabbed first one side and then the other with his bamboo pole, but though he heaved and grunted the craft only swung a little across the current and remained fixed. Kolemenos said, "Let's give him a hand," so we waded out to the boat ten yards or so from the bank. Kristina watched from the grass as the Chinese handed us a spare bamboo. We rammed the pole under the bows and started levering, while the boatman thrust away above us with his own pole. After a few minutes of pleasantly hard work we got her off. The Chinese was delighted. His cargo was melons, nearly the size of footballs. As the sampan glided off he bombarded us with the fruit.

Maintaining a schedule of around twenty miles a day hard slogging for days on end made us welcome an occasional break. These days when we eased off were never wasted. One reason for stopping a few hours was to repair and remake worn-out moccasins and tend cut and swollen feet. The other reason was the necessity of earning our food—we could not always expect to be handed food out of charity.

To relate time and distance has been the greatest of my difficulties in recording the story of this bid for freedom. Particularly is this so concerning the passage through Mongolia, where we had no common

speech with the inhabitants and where, even if we were given the names of rivers, villages, or other landmarks, there was no means of setting the sounds down to help the memory in later years. But I believe our progress through inhabited Outer Mongolia to the wastes of Inner Mongolia occupied us from six to eight weeks.

This much I remember: The entry into the Gobi was not an abrupt transition. Twice we thought we were in it as we traversed long sandy stretches, but on each occasion a range of fairly tall hills intervened, and at the foot of the second range there was the boon of a shallow, sandy rivulet, beside which we camped for the night. That was our last drink of fresh water for a long, long time.

Towards nightfall of the next day we encountered a caravan trail at right-angles to our course, alongside which were seated four Mongolians watching over a steaming iron cauldron suspended from a metal tripod over a fire. They all appeared to be aged between thirty and forty, but the seniority of one was marked by the possession of a magnificent old rifle, long-barrelled, short-stocked, the almost black woodwork extending along the barrel and held to it by bands of gleaming brass. As he stood with the others to greet us the rifle showed as tall as the owner. The usual courtesies were exchanged but this time none of our guests knew Russian. They motioned us to one side of the fire where we sat in a wide semicircle while they faced us across the flames.

These were poorer travellers than those we had first met. I noticed that their jackets had been neatly patched in places. They had one mule between them on which the bare necessities for their journey were carried, including two water bags made, I think, from the stomach of camels. More water was added to the pot while we grinned and gestured futilely at the man with the gun to show our pleasure at the unexpected meeting. In deference to Smith's grey-streaked beard, the Mongol directed his attention to the American, whom he obviously regarded as the senior and therefore the leader of our party.

Eventually Mister Smith used the magic word Lhasa and the Mongol, after a minute of deliberation, pointed our direction. From inside his coat he drew a contraption which I can best describe as a metal cylinder on a long rod. From within the cylinder he drew out a length of silk

ribbon in the manner that a Westerner will produce a tape measure of the mechanically retracting kind. The silk was covered with symbols in a series of frames like the separate pictures on a cine film. He spent some time tranquilly contemplating the ribbon and finally, with a spinning motion of the hand returned the roll within its case. This performance we took to mean a prayer for the happy completion of our pilgrimage. Mister Smith bowed his acknowledgment.

I was to remember later that they thought our trail to Lhasa merited a special prayer. We were striding into the burning wastes of the Gobi waterless and with little food. None of us then knew the hell we were to meet.

Two days without water in the hillocky, sand-covered, August furnace of the Gobi and I felt the first flutterings of fear. The heat enveloped us, sucking the moisture from our bodies, putting ankle-irons of lethargy about our legs. Each one of us walked with his and her own thoughts and none spoke, dully concentrating on placing one foot ahead of the other interminably. Most often I led the way, Kolemenos and the girl nearest to me and the others bunched together a few yards behind. I was driving them now, making them get to their feet in the mornings, forcing them to cut short the noon rest. As we still walked in the rays of the setting sun the fear hit me again. It was, of course, the fundamental, most oppressive fear of all—that we should die here in the burning wilderness. I struggled against a panicky impulse to urge a return the way we had come, back to water and green things and life. I fought it down.

We flopped against a tall dune and the cold stars came out to look at us. Our bone-weariness should have ensured the sleep of exhaustion but, tortured with thirst, one after another twisted restlessly, rose, wandered around, and came back. Some time after midnight I suggested we start off again to take advantage of the cool conditions. Everybody seemed to be awake. We hauled ourselves upright and began again the trudge south. It was much easier going. We rested a couple of hours after dawn—and still the southerly prospect remained unaltered.

After this one trial there were no more night marches. Makowski stopped it.

"Can you plot your course by the stars?" he asked me. The others turned haggard faces towards me.

I paused before answering. "Not with complete certainty," I confessed.

"Can any of us?" he persisted. No one spoke.

"Then we could have been walking in circles all through the night," he said heavily.

I sensed the awful dismay his words had caused. I protested that I was sure we had not veered off course, that the rising sun had proved us still to be facing south. But in my own mind, even as I argued, I had to admit the possibility that Makowski was right. In any case, the seed of doubt had been sown and we just could not afford to add anything to the already heavy burden of apprehension.

Our feet were in a pitiable state as the burning sand struck through the thin soles of our worn moccasins. I found myself croaking at the others to get up and keep going. There is nothing here, I would say. There is nothing for days behind us. Ahead there must be something. There must be *something*. Kristina would stand up and join me, and Kolemenos. Then the others in a bunch. Like automatons we would be under way again, heads bent down, silent, thinking God knows what, but moving one foot ahead of the other hour after desperate hour.

On the sixth day the girl stumbled and, on her knees, looked up at me. "That was foolish of me, Slav. I tripped myself up." She did not wait for my assistance. She rose slowly from the sand and stepped out beside me. That afternoon I found to my faint surprise and irritation I was on my knees. I had not been conscious of the act of falling. One moment I was walking, the next I had stopped. On my knees, I thought, like a man at prayer. I got up. These were the signs of growing, strength-sapping weakness, but it would have been fatal to have acknowledged them for what they were. They were the probing fingers of death and we were not ready to die yet.

The sun rose on the seventh day in a symphony of suffused pinks and gold. Without much hope we watched Kolemenos climb laboriously to the top of a high mound. One or other of us did this every morning as soon as the light was sufficient to give clear visibility southwards to the horizon. He stood there for quite a minute with his hand over his eyes,

and we kept walking, expecting the usual hopeless shrug of the shoulders. But Kolemenos made no move to come down, and because he was staring intently in one direction, a few degrees to the east of our course, I dragged to a stop.

Kolemenos made no sound. He flung out his right arm and pointed. There was *something*, a dark patch against the light sand. It might have been five miles distant from us. Through the dancing early morning haze it was shapeless and defied recognition. Excitement grew as we looked.

"Could it be an animal?" asked the Sergeant.

"Whatever it is, it is not sand," Mister Smith replied. "Let's go and investigate."

It took us a good two hours to make the intervening distance. Many times we lost sight of the thing we sought as we plunged along in the sandy depressions. It began to take shape and definition, and hope began to well up in us. And hope became certainty. There were *trees*—real, live, growing, healthy trees, in a clump, outlined against the sand like a blob of ink on a fresh-laundered tablecloth.

"Where there are trees there is water," said the American.

"An oasis," somebody shouted, and the word fluttered from mouth to mouth.

Kristina whispered, "It is a miracle. God has saved us."

The trees, a dozen or more of them, were arranged in a crescent on the south side of the pool, and threw their shadow over it for most part of the day. The wonderful cool water lay still and inviting in an elliptical depression hemmed round with big, rough-worked stones. At this time, probably the hottest season, the limits of the water had receded inwards from the stone ring, and we had to climb over to reach it. The whole, green, life-giving spot could have been contained inside half-an-acre.

Zaro had the mug but we could not wait for him to fill it and hand it round. We lay over the water lapping at it and sucking it in like animals. We allowed it to caress our fevered faces. We dabbed it around our necks. We drank until someone uttered the warning about filling our empty bellies with too much liquid. Then we soaked our food sacks and, sitting on the big stones, gently laved our cracked and lacerated feet. For blissful minutes we sat with the wet sacking draped about our feet. With a mugful

of water at a time we rinsed from our heads and upper bodies some of the accumulated sand and dust of the six-and-a-half days of travail. The very feel and presence of water was an ecstasy. Our spirits zoomed. We had walked out of an abyss of fear into life and new hope.

The full extent of our good fortune was yet to be discovered. Some twenty yards east of the pool, on the opposite side from which we had approached, there were the remains of a still-warm fire and the fresh tracks of camels and many hoof-marks, telling of the recent halt of a big caravan. It had probably departed at sunrise. These men, whoever they were, had cooked and eaten meat, and the bones, as yet quite fresh and untainted, were scattered around the wood ashes. They were the bones of one large and one small animal and the meat had been sliced from them with knives, leaving small, succulent pieces still adhering. We shared out the bones and tore at them with our teeth, lauding our luck. Poor toothless Paluchowicz borrowed the knife from me and did as well as anybody. When there was no more meat we cracked each bone with the axe and sucked out the marrow.

For two or three hours during the heat of the afternoon we lay stretched out near the water under the blessed shade of the palms. Kolemenos, who had that rare gift of complete relaxation in any situation, snored with his arms behind his head and his cap pulled down over one eye. The sun's rays began to slant and I came out of a sleep haunted by blazing light and never-ending desert. I picked up the mug, climbed over the stones, scooped up water and drank again. The American stood up, stretched and joined me. Soon we were all up and about.

We were on our way when the sun came up and for half a day we could look back and see the trees of the oasis. I was glad when I could no longer see their shape against the skyline. For hours Zaro carried the mug, one hand underneath, the other over the top. He had filled it with water after we had all taken our final drinks and as he walked it slopped warm against his palm and little trickles escaped down the sides. When we halted at midday he had lost nearly half the quantity through spillage and evaporation and was complaining about the cramping of his arms in holding so tightly to the can. So, very carefully, sitting up under the small shade of our jackets slung over our clubs, we handed the water round and disposed of it a sip at a time.

For the first three days I thought we moved surprisingly well. On the fourth day the inescapable, strength-draining heat began quite suddenly to take its toll. Stumbles and falls became increasingly frequent, the pace slowed, and speech dried up into short grunted phrases. I remember Makowski saying, "Hell can't be hotter than this bloody desert."

On the fifth day Kristina went to her knees. I turned slowly round to look at her, expecting her to get to her feet as she had done before. She remained kneeling, her fair head bowed down on her chest. She was very still. I moved towards her and Kolemenos stepped back at the same time. Before we could reach her she swayed from the hips and slumped forward, her face in the sand. We reached her at the same time and turned her on her back. She was unconscious. I opened the neck of her dress and started talking to her, gently shaking her, while Mister Smith set to with sticks and *fufaikas* to make shade for her.

She came to quickly. She looked at our anxious ring of faces, sat up, smiled through split lips, and said, "I feel better now. I must have fallen over—I don't know how it happened."

"Don't worry," I consoled her. "We'll rest here a while and then you'll be all right again."

She leaned forward and lightly patted the back of my hand. "I won't fall down again."

We sat there a while. Kristina reached down to scratch her ankle and my eyes idly followed the hand. The ankle was swollen so that the skin pressed outward against the narrow-fitting ends of her padded trousers.

"Has anything bitten you, Kristina?"

"No, Slav. Why?"

"Your leg looks swollen."

She pulled up the trouser leg and looked, turning her foot about as she did so. "I hadn't noticed it before," she said.

We struggled on for a couple more hours. She seemed to be refreshed. Then she fell again and this time her knees buckled and her face hit the sand in almost one movement without even the action of putting her arms out to break the fall.

We turned her over again and wiped away the sand which had been forced into her nose and mouth. We put up the shelter. She lay with

eyes closed, breathing in harsh gasps through her mouth. I looked at her ankles and they were a pitiful sight. Both were badly discolored and so swollen that it seemed they would burst the restricting bottoms of the trousers. I took out my knife and slit the cloth upwards. The skin appeared to be distended by water right up to the knees. I touched the swelling and the mark of my fingers remained for some seconds.

Kristina was unconscious for an hour while we tried to stifle our gnawing anxiety with banalities like, "It must be just a touch of sunstroke." I had a feeling like lead in the pit of my stomach. I was frightened.

She was quite cheerful when she came round. "I am becoming a nuisance," she said. "What can be the matter with me?" We fussed around her.

Kristina got to her feet. "Come on. We are wasting time."

I walked alongside her. She stopped suddenly and glanced down at her legs, her attention attracted by the flapping of slit trousers about her legs.

"My legs are getting quite thick, Slav."

"Do they hurt you, Kristina?"

"No, not at all. They must be swelling because I have walked so far."

For the first two hours of the sixth day the air was cool and walking was as pleasant as ever it can be in the desert. But soon the sun began to blaze at us out of a sky empty of clouds.

I took Kristina's elbow. "Can you keep going in this?"

"Yes, I think so."

Five minutes later she had folded up and was out, face down in the sand. Again we ministered to her and waited for her to open her eyes. She appeared to be breathing quite normally, like a tired child.

I took a few steps away from her and the others came over to me. "She is very swollen," I said. "Do any of you know what that means?" Nobody knew the symptoms. We went back to her and waited. I flapped my cap over her face to make some air.

She smiled at us. "I am being a trouble again." We shook our heads. "I am afraid you had better leave me this time."

We all broke into protest at once. Kolemenos dropped down on his knees beside her. "Don't say that. Don't be a silly little girl. We shall never leave you." She lay there for another half-an-hour and when she tried to force herself up on her elbows she fell back again.

I spoke to Kolemenos. "We must give her a hand." We lifted her to her feet. "I can walk if you stay near me," she said.

Amazingly she walked, Kolemenos and I lightly holding her elbows. After a quarter of a mile we felt her start to fall forward. We steadied her and she went on again. She pulled herself erect and there was not a sound of distress, not a whimper. The next time she slumped forward we could not hold her. She had played herself utterly out and even the gallant will in that frail body could not produce another torturing effort. We were all in a bunch around her as the sun climbed up over our heads. Kolemenos and I each put an arm about her and, half-carrying, half-dragging her, set off again. A mile or so of that and I had no reserve of strength to give her. We stopped and I bent double fighting for breath.

"Stick beside me, Slav," said Kolemenos. "I am going to carry her." And he lifted her into his arms, swayed for a moment as he adjusted himself to the weight, and staggered off. He carried her for fully two hundred yards and I was there to ease her down when he paused for a rest.

"Please leave me, Anastazi," she begged. "You are wasting your strength." He looked at her but could not bring himself to speak.

We made a shelter there and stayed for perhaps three hours through the worst heat of the day. She lay still—I do not think she could move. The ugly swelling was past the knees and heavy with water. Kolemenos was flat on his back, restoring his strength. He knew what he was going to do.

The sun began to decline. Kolemenos bent down and swung her into his arms and trudged off. I stayed with him and the rest were all about us. He covered fully a quarter of a mile before he put her down that first time. He picked her up again and walked, her head pillowed on his great shoulder. I can never in my life see anything so magnificent as the blond-bearded giant Kolemenos carrying Kristina, hour after hour, towards darkness of the awful sixth day. His ordeal lasted some four hours. Then she touched his cheek.

"Put me on the ground, Anastazi. Just lay me down on the ground."

I took her weight from him and together we eased her down. We gathered round her. A wisp of a smile hovered about the corners of her mouth. She looked very steadily at each one of us in turn and I thought

she was going to speak. Her eyes were clear and very blue. There was a great tranquillity about her. She closed her eyes.

"She must be very tired," said Sergeant Paluchowicz. "The poor, tired little girl."

We stood around for several minutes, dispirited and at a loss to know what to do next. The shoulders of Kolemenos were sagging with exhaustion. We exchanged glances but could think of nothing to say. I looked down at Kristina. I looked at the open neck of her dress, and in a second I was down at her side with my ear over her heart. There was no beat. I did not believe it. I turned my head and applied the other ear. I lifted my head and picked up her thin wrist. There was no pulse. They were all looking at me intently. I dropped her hand and it thumped softly into the sand.

The American spoke, hardly above a whisper. I tried to answer but the words would not come. Instead the tears came, the bitter salt tears. And the sobs were torn from me. In that God-forsaken place seven men cried openly because the thing most precious to us in all the world had been taken from us. Kristina was dead.

I think we were half crazy there beside her body in the desert. We accused ourselves of having brought her here to her death. More personally, Makowski, speaking in Polish, blamed me for having insisted on leaving the shelter of the oasis.

The American intervened, his voice cold and flat. "Gentlemen, it is no use blaming ourselves. I think she was happy with us." The talk ceased. He went on, "Let us now give her a decent burial."

We scraped a hole in the sand at the base of a dune. Little pieces of stone that we sifted from the grains as we dug deeper we laid apart. I slit open a food sack and laid the double end gently under her chin. We lowered the body. On her breast lay her little crucifix. We stood around with our caps in our hands. There was no service, but each man spoke a prayer in his own language. Mister Smith spoke in English, the first time I had heard him use it. I opened out the sacking and lifted it over her face and I could not see for tears. We covered her with sand and we dotted the mound round with the little stones.

And Kolemenos took her tall stick and chopped a piece off it with his axe and bound the one piece to the other with a leather thong to make a cross.

So we said goodbye to her and went our empty way.

The awful thing was that there was so little but the girl to think about. Walking was sheer painful habit—it required no thought to perform. The sun beating down hour after hour would addle my brains and check the orderly sequence of thinking. I found I could imagine she was still there, just behind my shoulders, and I could scuff along for miles seeing her. But there always came a time when the idea of her presence was so strong that I must turn my head, and bitter grief would knife at me all over again. It took another tragedy to dull the sharp edges of our memory of her. Oddly, too, it relieved some of the load of guilt I felt about her death.

On the eighth day out from the oasis Sigmund Makowski pitched over into the sand. His arms were still at his sides when his face thumped down and he had made no effort to use his stick to prevent the fall. He lay there a minute or two and was barely conscious. We looked down at him and saw the tell-tale sign. Over the top of his moccasins the flesh was soft and puffy. We exchanged glances and said nothing. We turned him round and flapped our sacks in his face and he recovered quickly. He got to his feet, shook his head from side to side, grabbed his stick and plunged off. He keeled over again and again, but he kept going. And all the time the sickening flabby swelling grew upwards and weighed upon his legs.

Makowski lasted longer after the first onset than Kristina had done. On the ninth day he must have slumped down half-a-dozen times in a couple of hours. Then, lying flat and heaving desperately with his arms to get himself to his knees, he called out the name of Kolemenos. Both Kolemenos and I knelt down beside him.

"If you give me a hand to get to my feet, I can keep going."

Kolemenos took one arm, I took the other. We got Makowski upright. Feebly he shook our hands off and stood swaying. I felt myself choking as he staggered off like a drunken man, still going forward, but weaving

from side to side, stabbing his stick into the yielding sand as he went. The six of us stood there hopelessly and watched him go.

"Mustn't let him fall again," Kolemenos said to me.

It was not difficult to catch up with him. Kolemenos took his stick from him and we took an arm each. We put his arms about our shoulders and stepped out. He swung his head round to each of us in turn and gave a bit of a smile. He kept his legs moving, but progressively more weakly so that towards the end of the day he was an intolerable, sagging burden about our necks.

That night he seemed to sleep peacefully and in the morning of the tenth day he was not only still alive but appeared to have regained some strength. He set off with the rest of us, dragging his feet but unaided. He moved for half-an-hour before his first fall, but thereafter he pitched over repeatedly until Kolemenos and I again went to his rescue. When the time came to make our noon-day halt he was draped about our shoulders like a sack and his legs had all but ceased to move. Mister Smith and Paluchowicz eased his weight away from us and gently laid him down on his back. Then we put up the shelter and squatted down around him. He lay quite still and only his eyes seemed to be alive.

After a while he closed his eyes and I had thought he had gone, but he was still breathing quietly. He opened his eyes again. The lids came down and this time he was dead. There was no spasm, no tremor, no outward sign to show that life had departed the body. Like Kristina, he had no words for us at the end.

The dossier for Sigmund Makowski, aged thirty-seven, ex-captain of the Polish frontier forces, *Korpus Ochrony Pogranicza*, was closed. Somewhere in Poland he had a wife. I would like her some day to know he was a brave man. We buried him there in the Gobi. The first grave we scratched out was too small and we had to lift out the body and enlarge the hole. We laid his sack, empty of food for so long, that he had carried with him for two thousand or more miles, over his face, and scooped the sand over him. Kolemenos made another small wooden cross; we said our prayers and we left him.

In the shadow of death we grew closer together than ever before. No man would admit to despair. No man spoke of fear. The only thought

spoken out again and again was that there must be water soon. All our hope was in this. Over every arid ridge of hot sand I imagined a tiny stream and after each waterless vista there was always another ridge to keep the hope alive.

Two days after Makowski's death we were reaching the limits of endurance. I think it was about the twelfth day out from the oasis. We plodded on for two more exhausting, heart-breaking days before we reached firm ground, a waste of lightly sanded rocks. We lay there in the extremity of our weakness and looked back at our tracks through the sand. There were no defined footmarks, only a dragging trail such as skis make in snow. Lifeless and naked the rocky ridge sloped easily into the distance above us. In my mind was the one thought that over the hump there might be water. We rested a couple of hours before we tackled the drag upwards. We took off our moccasins and emptied them of sand. We brushed the fine dust from between our toes. Then we went up and out of the Gobi.

Over the ridge there was more desolation. By nightfall we had dropped down into a stone-strewn valley. We might have struggled on longer but Marchinkovas fell and banged his knee. In the morning he showed us a big bruise and complained of a little stiffness but was able to walk. The pain passed off as he exercised it and he experienced no more trouble from the injury. We climbed again. There was no talking because none of us could spare the breath and movement of the lips was agony. We hauled ourselves along through a faint dawn mist and did not reach this next summit for several hours. From the top there was the view again of the great range to the east, looking even more formidable than at our first sight of it. Ahead there seemed to be an unbroken succession of low ridges corrugating the country as far as we could see.

It was the merest accident that we did not miss the water on our way down. We had all passed it when Zaro turned round and yelled the one wonderful word. It was no more than a trickle from a crack in a rock but it glinted like silver. It crept down over the curve of a big round boulder and spread thinly over a flat rock below. Kolemenos and I had been picking our way down the slope some twenty yards ahead of Zaro when his shout arrested us. We turned quickly and scrambled back. We found that the

source of the little spring was a crack just wide enough to take the fingers of one hand. The water was sparkling, clean, and ice-cold. We channeled the tiny stream to a point where we could lead it into our battered and much travelled metal mug and sat down impatiently to watch it fill. The operation took fully ten minutes.

I said to Zaro, "You had passed this point. What made you turn round and find it?"

Zaro spoke quite seriously. "I think I must have smelt it. It was quite a strong impulse that made me turn my head."

The water tinkled musically into the mug until it was brimming. Carefully Zaro lifted it away and I noticed his hand was trembling a little so that some of the water spilled over. He faced Smith and, with a bow, and in imitation of the Mongolian etiquette of serving the senior first, handed him the water. The mug was passed round and each man took a gulp. No nectar of the gods could have tasted so wonderful. Again and again we filled the mug and drank. And then we left it, full and running over, under the life-giving spring so that any of us could drink whenever he felt like it.

The wearing trek went on day after day. Our diet was still confined to an occasional snake—we lived on them altogether for upwards of three weeks from the time of our first sampling back in the desert. The wiry mountain grass grew more abundant with each passing day and its color was greener. Then the country presented us with struggling low bushes and lone-growing dwarf trees, ideal fuel for the fires which we now started to light every night. The specter of thirst receded as we found clear-running rivulets. It was rare now that we had to go waterless for longer than a day.

The time then was about the beginning of October 1941 and it was to take us over three months to cover about fifteen hundred miles of difficult country to the Himalayas. We tried always to do at least twenty miles a day. Often we did more. There were occasional days, too, when we did no travelling, glad of the rest and refreshment provided by friendly Tibetan villagers. The tradition of hospitality to travellers was an innate and wonderful part of the life of these people; their generosity was open-handed and without thought of reward. Without their help we could not have kept going.

It seemed to me that our resistance to the increasingly sharp cold of the nights was markedly weaker than it had been when we first made our break at the end of the Siberian winter. The ordeal of the Gobi had left its imprint on us all. We found ourselves plodding on after the reasonable limit of a day's march had been reached in order to find a spot offering fair shelter for the night. On the other hand we sometimes cut short the scheduled distance on discovering a small cave or some other well-protected place. The gathering of fuel became almost an obsession and it became unthinkable that we should spend a night without a fire burning throughout.

In the mornings the ground was thick with white frost and it stayed for a long time after the sun had risen. The skyline to the east was indented with the silhouettes of peaks white-tipped with snow. As always, we wondered just where we were.

We had been on the move for about an hour after dawn when I saw, over to the left of our course and up to ten miles distant, a smear of smoke. We were hungry, stiff, and not very warm. We decided to investigate. We came down a hill scrub-covered on its upper reaches, giving way to grass of good sheep-grazing quality. As we got nearer we saw the smoke came from several fires and knew we were approaching some kind of settlement, hidden from us by the rounded shoulder of the opposite hill.

It was well past noon when we reached the village. The hill threw out a green-clothed buttress like a long arm and ten small box-like houses nestled there like a child in the crook of its mother's arm. We came in slowly on an almost due west-east track, frequently pausing to look round so that the villagers would have ample warning of our visit. We did not know then what reception to expect.

A closer view of the village revealed the presence of a number of children, some chickens, goats, and the first yaks any of us had ever seen outside a zoo. We came near to the first house and stopped, interested in the novel spectacle of a man harnessing a yak to a high two-wheeled cart. He dropped the harness and let the beast go free. We stood our distance as he turned towards us. We bowed, our eyes on his young, flat, glistening face. Meticulously he returned the salutation. He talked and I talked but all the pair of us learned was that we could not understand each other.

The children grouped themselves behind the man and listened to the exchange. All the time they kept darting glances at the blond giant. The villager turned round, walked a few paces, turned, and motioned us to follow. The children ran past and ahead of him to spread the news through the village of our coming.

As we trod close on the heels of our guide I looked about me. I saw a few cultivated patches but nothing was now growing on them. I saw a woman leave a goat she was milking and hasten indoors. More children came out of houses and shyly scrutinized the strangers. Beyond the last house, some twenty or thirty yards from it, I saw the village was bounded on the eastern side by a stream. I thought how well the place was sited. I noted how quickly the children lost their shyness: Soon there were a dozen pattering along beside us. At about the middle of the uneven row of houses the guide stopped. This dwelling followed the same unassuming pattern as the others, but it was distinguished from them by being slightly larger and having a porch formed of two sturdy timbers at its door.

"This looks interesting," Mister Smith whispered to me as the man disappeared through the door.

"I think he's gone inside to fetch the mayor," said Zaro.

There was not much time for further speculation. Almost as though he had been waiting behind the door, a new figure emerged through the porch. I judged him to be about fifty and he wore the normal dress of the country topped with a loose sheepskin jacket. He was a little taller than the average Mongolian and, though as dark as any of them, his features were not of so pronounced a Mongolian cast. We exchanged the usual greetings before he spoke in the language of the country. I shook my head and replied in slow, precise Russian. His face lit up, he beamed at me.

"Welcome," he said in Russian. "Now we shall be able to talk."

We were rather taken aback. He spoke Russian easily and without hesitation. I had to remind myself that there could be no danger so far south of the Soviet in a chance encounter with a Russian.

He waited a moment for me to reply and when I did not he went on eagerly, "I am a Circassian and it is a long time since I met anyone who could speak Russian."

"A Circassian?" I repeated. "That is most interesting." I could not think of anything less banal to say.

His questions tumbled over themselves. "Are you pilgrims? It is not many Russians who are Buddhists. You came through the Gobi on foot?"

"Yes, on foot."

"It must have been a terrible experience for you. Once I nearly died myself on that journey."

He was going to ask more questions, but suddenly recollected his duty as a host. He apologized and invited us into his home. We trooped inside. A stone partition divided the one big room and I caught a glimpse of a woman I took to be his wife hustling three or four children out of the front half to presumably the kitchen at the rear. Little details leapt into notice—a few shining tin mugs, a row of wooden spoons on a shelf, a bunch of hanging dried herbs, and, most oddly, in one corner a framed six-inch-square lithograph of Saint Nicholas in the Russian Orthodox style, much faded behind its glass pane. Underneath the lower edge of the frame was a metal stand on which stood a miniature oil lamp of simple construction with a red glass. There were wooden benches, solidly made, a stone cooking range, a heavy wooden bucket with a boat-shaped dipper, a flour mill, a primitive wool-spinning machine. The small amount of space available was well utilized. Around the walls were wooden bunks covered with home-woven rough wool blankets.

We sat, rather awkwardly in such unusual surroundings, on the benches. The Circassian—either designedly or perhaps forgetfully, he never gave us his name and we never volunteered ours—addressed himself to me again. The first question startled us.

"Are you armed?"

"No, none of us is armed," I answered.

"Have you nothing even to chop wood with, for instance?"

"Oh, yes. We have an axe and a knife between the six of us, unless you count the sticks we carry."

"Is that all? It isn't very safe to travel in this part, you know."

I was puzzled. "I don't understand you. We have met with no trouble up to now."

He paused a moment, looking us over. "Have you seen any Chinese? I mean armed Chinese, Chinese soldiers."

"No, not a sign of one."

Then he got up and went from the room. Smith leaned over to me and urged me to find out some more about the mysterious Chinese.

He came back in about five minutes. I think he had been out to give instructions about the preparation of a meal. He listened gravely to my question.

"I thought it right to warn you," he said, "that Chinese troops occasionally pass through this village. Sometimes they buy fowls from us. They seem to be exploring the area, although this is Tibet. I have seen them go off to the south in the direction of Lhasa. Since you speak only Russian they would be suspicious of you. If you see them it would be best to stay out of their way."

It was well-meant advice and I thanked him for it, but we never did run across any Chinese soldiers. Within half-an-hour of our arrival we were being regaled with tea and oaten cakes. Nobody spoke much until the food had gone. We were too busy filling our empty stomachs. Then our host produced a pipe and a bowl of tobacco and handed round the bowl. Soon the place was a haze of blue smoke which drifted out through the open door.

"So you are going to Lhasa," he said between puffs of his pipe. He said it politely as a conversational gambit. I do not think he necessarily believed it.

"Don't forget," he warned us, "that the nights are fiercely cold, especially on the heights. You must never be tempted to seek sleep without adequate shelter. You must never be too tired to build yourselves a fire. If you go to sleep unprotected on the mountains you will be dead in the morning. It is a swift death and you will never know it is happening to you.

"You are going in the right direction for Lhasa. There is a track from here for the next stage of your journey which you will find easy to follow. Tonight you must all stay here and in the morning I will show you how to go. These tracks can be confusing and in following them you must keep your sense of direction. Some of them lead only from village to village in

a small area and you would waste a lot of time on them. They are almost family affairs, trails beaten out over centuries.

"If you come across any village towards nightfall, stay there until the morning. You will always have a roof over your heads and be given a meal. No one will ask you for payment."

"Our trouble," Mister Smith broke in, "is that we do not know the language."

Our host smiled. "That is not such a handicap. If you bow to a Tibetan and he bows back, no other introduction is needed. You are accepted as a friend."

In the early evening we were treated to a meal of roasted mutton which one of the Circassian's elder sons had killed soon after our arrival. While we ate, the father cut off strips of meat for the younger children and they ran out through the door with the meat in their hands. Salt was produced in a bowl to help our eating and I fear I ate a lot more of it than a thoughtful guest should have done. It was a delight to savor its sharp piquancy again.

After the evening meal half-a-dozen neighbors joined the party, packing the room to its limits. The hard-working Tibetan wife produced more tea. Smoke was puffed out in great clouds and the Circassian was kept busy translating the busy talk between us and the neighbors. In this community he was obviously of great eminence, much respected for his gift of tongues and knowledge of matters of the big world outside the valley. He was human enough to enjoy his role, but carried it off with dignity and modesty.

As the place warmed up, the lice began to stir from their hideouts in our clothes. My body began to itch and so did my conscience. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the others reaching inside their *fufaikas* for a furtive scratch. I sidled over to the Circassian and spoke quietly.

"I think my friends and I should sleep outside tonight. We have picked up a lot of lice on our travels and can't get rid of them."

He laid a hand lightly on my shoulder. "Please set your mind at rest. Lice are no strangers to us. Tonight you all sleep under my roof."

The others asked me what the talk had been about. I related it to them. They smiled their relief. It seemed I had not been the only one to have worried about our uninvited camp-followers.

The neighbors bade us goodnight and went their way. They went like men who have had a rare and enjoyable evening. I could imagine that we had provided them with material for many a reminiscent talk to brighten their uneventful lives. Many of their questions had been about Kolemenos. This fair-haired big man from another world intrigued them mightily. We told them he came from a Western country near the sea. Kolemenos added the word Latvia, but it meant nothing to them.

We slept in bunks—our first night under a roof since our escape. How the family disposed themselves for the night I do not know. There was some makeshift arrangement behind the stone partition for the Circassian and his wife but I think the children must have been taken in by other villagers. For the first time I felt able to relax. I had a glorious, warm feeling of complete safety. I slept a deep, refreshing, untensed sleep and only half-woke at the urging of the rising sun. They let us lie on until the day was a few hours old. The household had long been astir and two of the younger children were peering in at us as we sat up in our beds. They ran out and I heard them chattering to their father.

Our benefactor came in with some squares of thick home-spun linen over his arm. "Perhaps you gentlemen would like to wash?" he inquired with a smile.

"This is real hotel service," Zaro joked. "Just lead us to the bathroom."

The Circassian joined in the laugh. "It is at the end of the village—nice, clean, flowing water."

We went down to the stream. The morning air was sharp but we stripped to the waist, immersed our heads in the water, gasped, splashed, and rubbed vigorously. We were tempted to wash our jackets and fur waistcoats but decided that we should have to wait too long for them to dry. We felt fine and chuckled at some spontaneous clowning by Zaro on the way back. The inevitable following of curious children enjoyed his antics even more.

We were given more meat, more oaten cakes, more tea. Then it was time to go.

"When you come back this way," said the Circassian earnestly, "do not forget this house. It will always be a home to you."

The American answered, "Thank you. You have been very kind and generous to us."

I said, "Will you please thank your wife for all she has done for us."

He turned to me. "I won't do that. She would not understand your thanks. But I will think of something to say to her that will please her."

He spoke to her and her face broke into a great smile. She went away and returned with a wooden platter piled with flat oaten cakes, handed them to her husband, and spoke to him.

"She wants you to take them with you," he told us. We shared them out gratefully.

There was one other parting gift—a fine fleece from the man, handed over with the wish that it might be used to make new footwear or repair our worn moccasins. We never did use it for that purpose, but later it made us half-a-dozen pairs of excellent mittens to shield our hands from the mountain cold.

He walked with us out of the village, pointed out our way. For the only time in our travels we received specific and detailed instructions of our route.

"Some of the tracks you will follow will not be easy to find," he warned. "Don't look for them at your feet; look ahead into the distance—they show up quite clearly then."

He described landmarks we were to seek. The first was to be a crown-shaped mountain about four days distant and we were to take a path which would lead us over the saddle between the two north-facing points of the "crown." From the heights we were to set course for a peak shaped like a sugar-loaf, which we would find to be deceptively far away. It might take us two weeks to reach it, he thought. More than that he could not from here tell us accurately, but eventually we should reach a road leading to Lhasa which at some point forked east to the city and southwest to the villages of the Himalayan foothills.

We left him there, a little knot of children at his heels. When we turned round he made a most un-Mongolian gesture—he waved his arm to us. The last we saw of him was a figure still waving a farewell.

Marchinkovas spoke for us all when he said, "These people make me feel very humble. They do a lot to wipe out bitter memories of other people who have lost their respect for humanity."

For a few days we were on the look-out for Chinese troops, but we met no one and saw no one. We disciplined ourselves not to touch our oatcakes until the third day—we had three each—and then we spread out the eating of them as an iron ration. Our track was clearly marked and the way was not too hard. There were plenty of small bushy trees something like the dwarf junipers of Siberia which burned brightly and gave out good heat. At the end of the fourth day we camped at the foot of the crown-shaped mountain and started our climb at first light the next day. The ascent was long but not difficult and the crossing occupied us two days.

It had been fully a week since our last real meal when we came across a mixed herd of sheep and goats and found the two houses of the Tibetans who owned them. The day was warm and brightly sunny after the freezing temperatures of the heights. There were scattered bushes of a species of wild rose, attracting the eye with gay blooms of yellow and red and white.

The house into which we were taken by the Tibetan herdsman was in the same style as that of the Circassian but smaller and not so well equipped. But the courtesy and the hospitality was of the same impeccable standard. The family consisted of the man and his wife in their middle thirties, a woman of about twenty-five who could have been the wife's sister, and four children whose ages ranged from about five to sixteen. We were given milk to drink on arrival and later two massive meals of goatmeat. By signs we were urged to spend the night and willingly accepted the offer. The whole family turned out to bow their farewells in the morning.

The explicit directions of the Circassian led us unerringly to the looming bulk of the sugar-loaf mountain and over it. The crossing would have been easier for me had not my old leg wound just above the ankle started to break open. I made a bandage by cutting a length of the rough material from the top of my sack, but the wound remained sore and painful to touch. Pulses of pain reminded me, too, of the spite of a German grenade fragment which I had not felt at the time it thudded home.

The weeks dragged on, October made way for November, the days were cool and the nights were freezing. Over long stretches of country too barren to support even sheep and goats we sometimes went for four and five days without food. There were bleak, mist-enveloped mornings when I felt leadenly dispirited, drained of energy, and reluctant to flog my weary body into movement. We all had our bad days in turn. The meals we were so generously given were massive but we lacked fresh green-stuff. The result was that we continued to be ravaged by scurvy. But we counted ourselves fortunate that no member of the party suffered a major breakdown in health and the march went on. We swam turbulent rivers when we had to. We negotiated formidable-looking peaks which turned out on closer acquaintance to offer surprisingly little difficulty; we struggled over innocent-looking hills which perversely offered precipitous resistance to our advance.

Marchinkovas one night started a discussion on the advisability of pressing on right through to the Himalayas. He thought we should consider going to Lhasa or some other city where we could live for a time and build up strength for the last stage. He was mildly supported by Paluchowicz. The rest of us were against wasting time. I was afraid such temporizing might soften the hard core of our resolution. The months had built up a compulsive migrant force in us, a rigid, driving habit of movement, and I wanted no interference with it until we had reached the final and complete safety of India.

The American put up the practical consideration that we might not find ourselves so warmly welcomed by the officialdom of a big city as we had been by the country people. There might be awkward questions, demands that we should produce papers.

Marchinkovas was not insistent on his idea. He had thrown it in to sound out opinion and was quite content with the outcome. It had not been a suggestion born of any sense of defeatism. Marchinkovas was as convinced of eventual success as the rest of us. We could not afford to think of failure.

In the fullness of time we came to a fork in the rough trail which we confidently accepted as that mentioned to us by the Circassian—the eastward branch leading to Lhasa and the other southwest to India. A few hours later we saw far off a big caravan of possibly fifty men and animals

creeping slowly away from us in the direction we imagined to be Lhasa. It was the only large travelling group we ever saw in the country.

We found this to be a country not only of rugged ranges but also of great lakes. Near the end of November our way led us to a vast sheet of water like an inland sea. The lake margin was our guide for many miles. A couple of days later we were in broken country again. There was a cluster of a few houses where we stayed for only one meal and on our refusal to stay overnight were given food to carry with us. We were moving well and morale was excellent. My leg wound had closed cleanly and I had discarded the bandage.

Three or four days after leaving the great lake we camped in a valley strewn with gaunt rocks where the thin vegetation struggled to exist. In a shallow cave we settled down to eat what remained of our flat cakes of coarse-milled flour. The night breeze eddied the smoke from the fire about us and we sat close together for warmth. There was little to distinguish this night from dozens of others that now lay behind us. Certainly there was nothing to warn us that this was to be the setting for tragedy.

We slept, as always with the exception of Kolemenos, fitfully. One and another would awake mumbling from half-dreams to get up and tend the fire. Zaro it was who rose and went out as another day began palely to light the still desolation of the valley. I lay propped on one elbow as he came back.

"There's some mist about and it's cold," he said to me. "Let's get moving." He stepped over the others, rousing them one by one. Paluchowicz lay next to me; Marchinkovas was huddled between Smith and Kolemenos. I stood up and stretched, rubbed my stiff legs, flapped my arms about. There was a general stirring. Kolemenos pushed me with elephantine playfulness as I limbered up.

Zaro's voice cut in on us. "Come on, Zacharius. Get up!" He was bending over Marchinkovas, gently shaking his shoulder. I heard the note of panic as he shouted again, "Wake up, wake up!"

Zaro looked up at us, his face tight with alarm. "I think he's ill. I can't wake him."

I dropped on my knees beside Marchinkovas. He lay in an attitude of complete relaxation, one arm thrown up above his head. I took the

outstretched arm and shook it. He lay unmoving, eyes closed. I felt for the pulse; I laid my ear to his chest, lifted the eyelids. I went through all the tests again, fearful of believing their shocking message. The body was still warm.

I straightened up. I was surprised at how small and calm my voice was. "Marchinkovas is dead," I said. The statement sounded odd and flat to me, so I said it again. "Marchinkovas is dead."

Somebody burst out, "But he can't be. There was nothing wrong with him. I talked to him only a few hours ago. He was well. He made no complaint. . . ."

"He is dead," I said.

Mister Smith got down beside the body. He was there only a minute or two. Then he crossed the hands of Marchinkovas on his chest, stood up, and said, "Yes, gentlemen, Slav is right." Paluchowicz took off his old fur cap and crossed himself.

Zacharius Marchinkovas, aged twenty-eight or twenty-nine, who might have been a successful architect in his native Lithuania if the Russians had not come and taken him away, had given up the struggle. We were stunned; we could not understand it. We did not know how death had come to him. Perhaps he was more exhausted than we knew and his willing heart could take the strain no more. I don't know. None of us knew. Marchinkovas the silent one with the occasional shaft of cynical wit, Marchinkovas who lived much with his own thoughts, the man with a load of bitterness whom Kristina had befriended and made to laugh—Marchinkovas had gone.

The days were cold now, the nights colder. Snow-charged clouds hung menacingly over the distant, gaunt foothills of the Himalayas. In a poor hamlet of four stone-built shacks we stayed one night and the next morning spent several hours making warm mittens from the Circassian's gift fleece.

There came one clear day when we saw the snow-capped, cloud-topped soaring hump of the Himalayas, deceptively near. We were, in fact, a long way off and were to find the intervening distance fraught with trial and hazard.

We tried desperately not to be caught on the heights after darkness, but there was nothing we could do about it when early one afternoon we were enveloped in a howling snowstorm. It would have been folly to push on through it. The snow was whipping into our eyes and it was difficult to see more than a few yards ahead. As we crept along looking for shelter the snow packed hard on our moccasins. We were on a normally steep descent and the slippery soles threatened us at every downward step with disaster.

About the beginning of March the five of us walked out of a snow-flurry along a sweeping downward east-to-west traverse into the sudden sunshine of a deep, white-clothed depression between the mountains. It was mid-morning and the sun invited us to take off our masks and caps. We sat down and rested, wrapped in silence. We had been foodless for a couple of days and our spirits were low. We sat hunched up without talking. Then I heard a sound and strained my ears to hear it again and identify it.

"I heard a dog bark," said Paluchowicz.

"I heard something, too," I put in.

Paluchowicz pointed excitedly. "It came from that direction. We must go and investigate."

We walked along for about a quarter of a mile with our ears pricked. The sound of the dog barking was so loud and so close when it came again that we stopped in our tracks. We looked around and could see nothing. We were expecting to see a house or a shack but there was no building of any sort in sight. The dog must have scented us, because it set up a prolonged yapping until we tracked down the source as the mouth of a cave, black against the surrounding whiteness. It was only about a hundred yards away, and as we went towards it we saw the figure of a man come out into the light and look in our direction. He spoke to the dog, now joined by another one, and it stopped its noise.

He was an elderly man, with wispy white hair around his chin and a seamed and wrinkled, weather-beaten brown face. His smile showed gaps where age had robbed him of some of his front teeth. He was well clothed against the cold with the usual Tibetan sheepskin surcoat over padded jacket and trousers. He wore a fine pair of boots of leather, the upper part

around the lower calf fretted with an openwork pattern which showed an inner lining of green felt. I don't know which side was the more delighted at the meeting. The old man wagged his head and bowed and talked and flashed his great gap-toothed smile. We bowed and laughed and were happy enough to have danced in a ring about him. Even the dogs, gingery brown and looking like smaller editions of Samoyeds, were infected with enthusiasm and ran round us furiously swinging their bushy tails and yelping with excitement.

Outside the cave was a low wall about four feet high made of loosely heaped stones which acted as a windbreak. He led us round the wall and into half-gloom and immediately, before our eyes became adjusted to the change of light, our noses were assailed by the strong, clinging, fuggy odor of sheep.

The small size of the opening left me unprepared for the lofty spaciousness of the interior. The cave bent round so that its floor plan was like a boomerang. The man and his dogs lived in the space of about fifteen feet from the opening to a point where the cave was partitioned off with a rubble wall. Behind, into the farthest recesses, were sheep, about a hundred of them, I judged. This then was the winter quarters of a shepherd awaiting the coming of spring and the melting of the snows so that the sheep could be allowed out to graze on the fresh green grass of the valley. On pegs hung four or five packs of hay in big-meshed nets. A pile of empty nets showed that the sheep had been penned inside for many weeks.

A fire burned in the middle of the floor and nearby was a heap of brushwood and dung fuel. One large and one small iron cauldron stood against the stones of the fireplace. The large one, I discovered, was used for melting snow to provide water for the sheep. The other was the shepherd's general utility cooking pot, in which he straightaway started brewing tea and for the only time in Mongolia or Tibet I saw tea made with loose dried leaf.

From his waist the old man took out a clasp knife and opened it. He knelt down and began with slow deliberation to sharpen the blade on a flat stone. The dogs got up and danced around him as he worked. They knew there would soon be fresh meat. He tried the edge of the steel on

the ball of his thumb, grinned at us, and went off among the sheep, the dogs frisking at his heels. He went outside the cave with a kicking, bleating young sheep under his arm and in a remarkably short time was back with the fresh-skinned carcass. The dogs were fed at the cave entrance with the head and tit-bits of offal and then he cut off joints for roasting. While the meat hung spitting and sizzling on a wooden bar over the fire, the old man amused us by putting his fine boots under the roast and allowing the fat to trickle over them, afterwards rubbing it into the leather, presumably to soften and preserve it. With coarse flour and a little water from the bottom of the big cauldron he kneaded up cakes and baked them on a flat stone over the side of the fire. We ate like starving men and there was no difficulty about the performance of belching our appreciation at the end of the meal.

When the old man went to lug the heavy water cauldron out of the cave, Kolemenos and I took it from him and carried it out. We all helped in the chore of filling it with snow. We made a move to carry it back when it was piled high, but he stopped us. With surprising agility he jumped up on top of the cauldron and began treading down the snow. He stepped down and we topped the cauldron up again. This time Zaro climbed up and danced with whoops of joy to press down the snow, while the old man chuckled with glee at the fun. The hard-packed mass of snow was melted over the fire and later the shepherd fed his flock with hay and watered them.

The presence of the sheep rather more than the smoldering fire made the cave very warm that night and I slept exhaustedly. A couple of times during the night the appalling stink of long-confined animals woke me and I wondered where I was, but I soon dropped off again, feeling warm and safe. Our Tibetan caveman was astir before us in the morning and by the time we were fully awake had prepared a thick gruel which he was slowly stirring over the built-up fire. His parting gift to us was the last quarter of the sheep he had killed the day before.

Outside the cave he was obviously asking us where we were going. We looked at the sun and pointed south. He took Zaro's outstretched arm and nudged it round until it pointed a few degrees west of south. And that was the way we went.

Towards the end of March 1942 we were convinced that at last we were very near the sanctuary of India. Barring our way ahead reared the tallest and most forbidding peaks we had yet seen. We told one another that one final effort must bring us to the country where we were sure ultimate freedom, civilization, rest, and ease of mind awaited us. I was tortured with the fear that the exertion of one more great climb would finish me.

We were blessed with fair weather. The wind was cold, but the sun shone strongly enough to attack the top layer of snow so that it melted sufficiently to re-form in the freezing night temperatures into a skin of crisp, treacherous ice. We climbed more surely, more cautiously, than ever before, Zaro double testing every foothold and handhold as he led the way upwards, chipping away with the axe, steam issuing in little clouds from his nose and mouth beneath the mask.

At the beginning of the third day we were over the top, only to find ourselves confronted with another peak. It was the stuff of which nightmares are made. Always it seemed there was another mountain to block our way. This next mountain was the worst in all our experience. The cold was terrible, eddying mist dropped down about us and lifted, dropped and lifted again. The effects of high altitude were draining from us what slight reserves of stamina we still had. Every step was a fight against torturing lassitude, making one want to sit down and cry with weakness and frustration. I could not get enough air into my bursting lungs and my heart thumped audibly, hammering against my chest.

We knew we should have to spend the night in this rarified atmosphere and the knowledge did our spirits no good.

"We must keep going while there's light," Zaro said. "We must try to get over the top before dark."

I do not remember going over the summit. I remember only the point at which I noticed with vague surprise that Zaro, leading, was slightly below me. We climbed again a little and then knew with certainty the descent had begun.

The night was the crisis of the whole enterprise. On a broad, flat ledge where the snow had drifted and piled, we axed through the hard crust of

the surface and dug laboriously through a few feet of snow to make ourselves a barely adequate refuge against the rigors of the night. We had no fire. We were so bone-weary we could have slept literally standing up, but we knew it would be courting death even to attempt to doze.

It was the longest night of my life. We huddled there standing, with our arms about one another. Sleep lay on our lids like a solid weight and I found myself holding my eyes open with fingertips pressed against the eyeballs under my mask. Three times Kolemenos, the arch-sleeper, let his chin sag on his chest and began to snore, and each time we punched and shook him back to consciousness. Each man was his brother's keeper, watching for drooping eyelids and the nodding head. At intervals we would stamp slowly around in a close ring. Even during this grotesque dance I began to swim down into beautiful, velvet sleep, but the American dragged me back by gently cuffing me, pulling my beard, and shaking me. Then came that awful pre-dawn period when fatigue and cold together combined to set me shivering in an uncontrollable ague from head to foot.

"Let's get going," said someone. "Let's get down to some place where we can breathe again."

Paluchowicz spoke. "I could not last another night like that." He was voicing the thought of us all.

It was barely light, but we broke out and started on our way, Paluchowicz leading and Zaro and I in the rear. In about ten hours of gruelling toil we must have come down about five thousand feet before nightfall. Breathing became easier, morale improved, hopes rose a little again. We dragged on through another depressing, wakeful night and continued the descent the next day until we were able to see the valley below quite clearly.

It was about midday that we set off to continue our descent. Everything went well and we made good time. Our spirits were up in spite of our empty bellies. We found an almost ideal cavity among the rocks to spend the night, were greeted by another clear, fine April morning breaking through a thin, quickly dissipated mist.

Two hours later it happened. Zaro and I had the rope's end belayed around our two stout sticks at the crest of a slope. I was laughing at something Zaro had said. The slope was short and hardly steep enough to

warrant the use of the rope, which lay loosely thrown out as a safety line in case Paluchowicz, crawling down backwards on all fours, should slip into an unseen crevice. Behind him were Smith and Kolemenos, well spaced out. All three were astride the limp rope without holding it.

I saw Paluchowicz reach the end of the slope. I turned to Zaro and in that instant saw the rope jerk about the sticks and become slack again. Simultaneously there was a brief, sharp cry, such as a man will make when he is suddenly surprised. Zaro and I swung together. It was a second or two before the awful truth struck me. Smith was there. Kolemenos was there. But Paluchowicz had vanished. Like fools we stood there calling out his name. No one answered. The other two, with their backs to Paluchowicz, did not know what had happened. They had stopped at our first shout and were looking up at us.

"Come back," I called out to them. "Something has happened to Anton."

They clambered back; I hauled in the rope and tied the loose end about my waist. "I am going down to see if I can find him," I said.

I reached the point where, from above, the slope appeared to fall gently away. Zaro took in the slack of the rope and I turned around as I had seen Paluchowicz do. The sight made me catch my breath. The mountain yawned open as though it had been split clean open with a giant axe blow. I was looking across a twenty-yard gap, the narrowest part of the chasm which dropped sickeningly below me. I could not see the bottom. I felt the sweat beading out on my forehead. Futilely I yelled, "Anton, Anton!" I turned and went back, so shaken that I held tightly to the rope all the way.

They all talked at once. Had I seen him? Why was I shouting? Where was he?

I told them what it was like down there, that there was no sign of Paluchowicz.

"We will have to find him," said Kolemenos.

"We will never find him," I told them. "He is gone."

Nobody wanted to believe it. I did not want to believe it myself. With difficulty we broke a way round to a new point from which we could look down into the abyss. Then they understood. We heaved a stone down and

listened for it to strike. We heard nothing. We found a bigger stone and dropped that down and there was still no echo of the strike.

We hung around there a long time, not knowing what to do. The disaster was so sudden, so complete. Paluchowicz was with us and then he was gone, plucked away from us. I never thought he would have to die. He seemed indestructible. Tough, toothless, devout old Sergeant Paluchowicz.

"All this way," said the American. "All this way, to die so stupidly at the last." I think he felt it more than any of us. As the two older men, they had been close together.

We climbed on down, trying to keep in sight the spot from which Paluchowicz had disappeared, vaguely hoping we might find his body. But we never found the bottom of the great cleft and we never found Paluchowicz.

There were some quite warm days after this and we could look back and see the majesty of the mountains we had crossed. We were in terrible need of food and now that the supreme effort was over we could barely keep ourselves moving. Exhausted, walking skeletons of men that we were, we knew now for the first time peace of mind. It was now that we lost, at last, the fear of recapture.

They came from the west, a little knot of marching men, and as they came closer I saw there were six Indian soldiers with an NCO in charge. I wanted to wave my hands and shout, but I just stood there with the other three watching them come. They were very smart, very clean, very fit, very military. My eyes began to fill and the tears brimmed over.

Smith stepped forward and stuck out his hand.

"We are very glad to see you," he said.

It was hard to comprehend that this was the end of it all. I leaned my weight forward on my stick and tried to blink my eyes clear. I felt weak and lightheaded like a man in a fever. My knees trembled with weakness and it required real effort to prevent myself slumping down on the ground. Zaro, too, was hunched over his stick, and one of Kolemenos's great arms was drooped lightly about his shoulders. The rough, scrubby country danced in the haze of a warm noon sun. The soldiers,

halted but five yards from us, were a compact knot of men in tropical shorts and shirts swimming in and out of my vision.

I dropped my head forward on my chest and heard the voice of Mister Smith. He talked in English, which I did not understand, but there was no mistaking the urgency in the tone. It went on for several minutes. I flexed my knees to stop their trembling.

The American came over to us, his face smiling. "Gentlemen, we are safe." And because we remained unmoving and silent, he said again in Russian, very slowly, "Gentlemen, we are safe."

Zaro started to laugh and jig inside the restraining arms. Then he had the American going round with him in a crazy, hopping polka, and they were both laughing and crying at the same time. I do not remember starting to dance but there we were, the four of us, stamping round, kicking up the dust, hugging one another, laughing hysterically through the blur of tears, until we collapsed one by one on the ground.

Kolemenos lay sprawled out repeating softly to himself the American's words. "We are safe . . . we are safe. . . ."

The American said, "We shall be able to live again."

Editor's note: Following a prolonged stay at a British Army hospital in Calcutta, Slavomir Rawicz joined Free Polish forces serving with the Royal Air Force in the Middle East. Due to the Communist takeover of Poland, he never returned to his home country. After the war, he settled in England where he married and had five children. Rawicz died in 2004.

Chapter Seven

Twelve Iron Men: Escape from the Philippines

Robert Barr Smith and Laurence J. Yadon

When the Japanese tide rolled over the Philippines in 1942, thousands of people became prisoners. They were American and Filipino, military and civilian, men and women, children too. Those who survived the horrors of the Bataan Death March and the brutality and illness of foul prisons like Cabanatuan or Bilibid hungered first for news of their loved ones, of the outside, of home and the free world, and second, for a way to return to that world. From the distant Philippines, neither desire was easy to fill.

Especially was this so for veterans of the Death March, none of whom would ever forget that ordeal, the prisoners tied to trees along the march route and bayoneted, the deliberate deprivation of food and, worse, water, the smug infliction of whatever indignity pleased the Japanese, from exhaustion to hunger to thirst to foul latrine trenches crawling with maggots. Many prisoners were forced to defecate in their own clothing; they dared not halt. One prisoner counted twenty-seven decapitated fellow prisoners along the march route before he quit counting.

Nobody would ever forget the brief rain shower, a gift from heaven, a chance to get a little moisture in their bodies, a little coolness on their filthy, weary skin. The marches, the cruelty, and the trips in stinking, crowded freight cars so hot you couldn't touch the side had one other beneficial effect on many men: hatred, deep and lasting. That emotion made many prisoners stronger in the midst of misery; they would live to take revenge, not for themselves so much as for all the dead men who littered the line of those ghastly marches. It would be years before Japan

reaped the whirlwind of her own sowing, but when that wind came, it would be terrible beyond belief.

A strange interlude came when prisoners were transported part of the way to Davao, their ultimate destination, in a ship, a little eight-knot clunker called—of all things—the *Erie Maru*. But—and this was a large *but*—the little vessel was run by the Japanese Imperial Navy, not the army, and the treatment of the prisoners was humane, even kind. The food was clean and palatable; one sick prisoner was carried up on deck near the captain's cabin. He was frequently visited by the captain himself and surrounded with little gifts from the crew—cigarettes, food, even a bowl of flowers.

Davao camp was, however, the same old thing, an army-run hole, dirty and brutal, which did nothing to reconcile the prisoners to Japanese captivity, nothing to dissipate the intense desire to escape. This is the story of twelve men, ten American prisoners of war and two Filipino civil prisoners, murderers at that, who managed the impossible: an escape from the Japanese-occupied Philippines. Their achievement would have been a monumental feat at any time; it was especially so in the spring of 1943, when the islands had long been Japanese occupied.

The escapers were all extraordinary men, who planned long and carefully to escape and reach friendly soil. Major Ed Dyess, veteran fighter pilot; Steve Mellnik, USAAF major; Jack Hawkins, first lieutenant, Marines; Paul Marshall, US Army sergeant; fighter pilot Sam Grashio, first lieutenant; second lieutenant Leo Boelens, a mechanical genius engaged in getting unflyable planes aloft; US Navy Lieutenant-Commander Melvyn McCoy, the senior officer; Mike Dobervich, also a Marine "first balloon"; Robert Spielman, US Army sergeant and bosom buddy of Marshall; Austin Shofner (called "Shifty"), Marine captain; and the two Filipinos, Ben de la Cruz and Victor Jumarong. De la Cruz was an experienced pharmacist and first-aid man; Jumarong was his friend. Not only would Ben not leave without Victor, but Victor was said to know the trail across the morass of swamp and mud that surrounded the camp and made movement very difficult.

Chaplain Richard Carberry had been one of the original group but elected to stay behind to minister to the religious needs of the rest of

the prisoners. He gave his life for his parishioners, dying in 1945 on the *Brazil Maru*, a foul prison ship bound for Japan, of wounds suffered in bombing by friendly aircraft; he was buried at sea along with many others.

Carberry was not alone. To the everlasting disgrace of the Japanese leaders, the unmarked prison ships were not only the worst of foul, cramped living conditions but also sitting ducks for Allied aircraft and submarines. There is some indication that the Allies knew the prison ships were among the convoys they attacked; it may well be so, but since the prison ships were unmarked, the sub skippers and aircraft pilots had no choice.

Being veteran military men, the Davao escapers knew the need to prepare, for they faced a long, hard march through brutal country, an ordeal for hungry, tired men even without pursuing Japanese. But between them they had a wealth of talent and no end of pure daring. They began accumulating canned food, mostly bartered for with the standard prison currency, cigarettes.

Dyess managed to be alone in the little compound hospital long enough to snag water purification tablets, a quart jug of quinine pills, and a kit containing not only the usual iodine and dressings but also invaluable sulfa drugs. Dobervich had a compass, kept since he was captured, and Hawkins still had his wristwatch. McCoy set Hawkins's watch and figured its variation based on a formula found in an old copy of *Ripley's Believe It or Not*.

In the navigation area, McCoy had torn out and secreted navigation tables and Mellnik contributed a book on astronomy, which he used to compute and compile data for navigation. Boelens, working from a picture in *Webster's Dictionary*, contrived a homemade sextant and stole tools from the machine shop while Sam Grashio purloined matches from the kitchen.

To Hawkins fell the task of getting the all-important bolo knives, essential to any progress at all where they were going. He enlisted the aid of an elderly Filipino, who finally delivered three bolos, complete with carved wooden sheaths. It was beautiful work, and Hawkins offered to pay for the knives out of their carefully hoarded store of money. The Filipino said, "No, no money." He only wanted one thing. "You kill Japs!"

The escapers didn't ignore the absolute necessity of breaking out in the best physical shape possible. That meant food, of course, far beyond

the miserable rations of the camp. There was a plan for that, too. Food was obviously a major concern at all times; even the Japanese funeral offerings for a dead guard were fair game. The cakes, rice, and meat disappeared to feed the friendly, and the rest was, in Dyess's words, "the first beer I had had in many a day."

Operation Chicken provided the best sustenance. Out beyond the fields of coffee where the prisoners labored was the compound chicken coop, where thousands of hens were kept, busy producing eggs and tasty meat additions to the guards' rice. Trouble was, the coop was surrounded by barbed wire, and a guard tower loomed above it. Careful reconnaissance, revealed, however, that the single sentry was given to a midday nap, and when he took it, a highly efficient team of chicken thieves and egg robbers went quickly to work.

The team "coordinator" orchestrated the hen-napping and egg-grabbing, while the "snatcher" actually did the deed. Another man, the "watcher," maintained surveillance over the single avenue of escape, and the "guard-sitter's" job was to warn of a guard's approach. The team had a set of simple hand signals, and once inside the snatcher was signaled by pebbles tossed onto the roof of the coop; a handful of pebbles thrown together translated as "run like hell." The poultry raids were risky but essential. The escapers correctly reasoned that there was no use escaping if they broke down on the trail outside from physical weakness.

Chicken-raiding had its risks, not least the concerted squawking of dozens of irate hens or the ever-present danger of wandering guards. There were several narrow escapes, but the system worked. The escapers were well fed: They got away with 133 hens in three months. Japanese suspicions were aroused about the time chicken number 75 disappeared, but they never solved the mystery. In their frustration, they did indulge in some typically Japanese antics. They withheld chicken feed in some sort of weird retaliation for the disappearing hens and the drop in egg supply. Such an action was not entirely surprising: They had been known to beat vehicle engines that would not start.

The final prisoner coup was the recruiting of Filipino friend Pop Abrina to help. It was not easy. Pop would not even speak to them for several days after the plot was revealed, and then he denounced the escape

as a pipe dream, an impossibility; there was the swamp, the headhunters, the Japanese. But then he slowly came around, in part lured by the thought of reward for him.

"Well," said McCoy, "we have influence in high places," and Mellnik had in fact worked for General MacArthur. They could promise nothing, of course, but the chance was enough. Pop was on board, and the escape had acquired a very good asset indeed, a daring man whom even the guards called "*tomodachi*"—friend—entertained by his banter and his tales of sexual conquest.

Davao "penal colony" was not only covered by the usual force of guards, but surrounded by a virtually impenetrable swamp, a gooey morass that stretched on for some twenty miles in every direction. There was life in the swamp all right, but most of it was of the mosquito and crocodile variety, except for wandering bands of natives, whose tasty habit was collecting people's heads. The locals believed the swamp had a malignant personality all its own. Maybe it did.

Certainly the camp's guard force did. Rumor had it that the deputy commandant, one Hozumi, had somehow disgraced himself in combat, and he and his guards took out his shame on the prisoners. The food was terrible and entirely insufficient, 600 grams a day for the hardest work, for men worked far too hard and were afflicted with a whole panoply of exotic diseases, most of which were not fixable.

But for the escape club, things gradually improved, helped along for them and the rest by the providential arrival of long-overdue Red Cross parcels, two per prisoner, a total of thirty pounds of good things. They came toward the end of January 1943 and got through even though the Japanese had stolen some of the contents. Both health and morale improved dramatically.

The escapers continued their scrounging and planning. Assuming they got through Dismal Swamp and evaded the Japanese, the plan was to press on to the east coast of Mindanao, striking it at about the town of Cateel. That was a difficult trip of some sixty miles, but worse was to come. After that, the plan called for larceny of a boat seaworthy enough to sail a mere 1,300 miles to Australia. Navigation would necessarily be by dead reckoning, with whatever help the improvised sextant could provide, but the

formidable McCoy thought it could be done. He wanted, however, a crew of at least nine, providing three three-man watches.

A new sense of urgency drove the plotters. What if, they wondered, the Japanese thought of instituting the "shooting squad" plan? That nasty Japanese mechanism, already in effect elsewhere, meant simply that if a man escaped, the other members of his squad would be automatically executed. Nobody was willing to sacrifice other prisoners for his own freedom, so that would put an end to thoughts of escape. There was reason to hurry.

And so an excuse for Sunday labor was invented. The Marines already went out on Sunday to change the grazing ground for the bulls they had charge of; that was routine. The others—assigned as coffee pickers—told the Japanese they wanted to build a rain shelter because too many of them were getting sick. Since this Sunday work would not interfere with routine coffee-bean picking and a healthier crew would obviously speed production, the Japanese agreed.

The escapers carefully studied and chose their route. The road was out; too many Japanese used it too often, which left either the railroad cut or a faint, abandoned trail. The trail was chosen, overgrown though it surely was, wandering though it did, because it was obscure and because it came out of the swamp some twenty miles away near a village called Lungaog. The invaluable Victor knew the way. There they might find help, even contact with the Philippine Resistance.

Two serious dangers the escape had to weather, with only a couple of weeks to go before getaway day. Busily stealing onions from the prison patch, Hawkins and Dobervich were accosted by a furious American officer and "disciplined" by the camp senior officer for breaking the Japanese rules. They were pulled from the plowing detail, but within days their sentences were "commuted," thanks to intervention by friends with enough rank to matter.

The last moments of preparation were the hardest. Dyess took the biggest risk, driving his buffalo cart to the departure point with a last load of escape gear concealed under stacks of saplings—"fence posts," to the guards he had to pass. He made it, thanks to his small kindnesses to the guards over many weeks; they all knew him and nobody thought to search his cart any longer.

Almost worse was what befell Grashio and Shofner: They had made a rare slip and were caught by Hozumi enjoying bananas, what the furious Japanese officer called the "fruit of the Japanese empire!" Some slapping and punching followed, but the worst moment came when one guard searched Shofner's musette bag, presumably looking for more of the imperial bananas. He missed the bottle of quinine, discovery of which would have sunk the whole enterprise and meant the death of both Americans.

They weren't out of the woods yet. The Japanese decided on mass punishment for the despicable crime of eating the emperor's bananas. On the Sunday appointed for the break, everybody was ordered to work in the rice paddies. There was nothing for it but to delay their break another week. It was high time to go, for incidents of brutality against the prisoners were on the rise. One prisoner had been shot to death for no good reason by a tower guard, and the army lieutenant colonel in charge of the sugarcane-cutting crew was tied to a stake and badly beaten for twenty-four hours. His heinous crime was trying to bring some sugarcane to patients in the hospital . . . presumably imperial sugarcane.

But the next Sunday dawned with the escape still not revealed, and the escapers packed a few precious trinkets and useful items and dressed for the run. They passed the guards on their way to "work" and linked up with Jumarong and de la Cruz, although both of them were late. Then it was the swamp trail and the great adventure.

The path was gloomy and overgrown, "as dark," in a favorite GI phrase, "as the inside of your hat." The Filipinos led the way, and it soon became apparent that if Jumarong once knew the trail, he'd lost it now. And so the little party went to Plan B, a vague and difficult trip to the northeast to try to hit the Japanese logging railway. The going was very hard indeed, but one bright spot there was: Instead of fiddling with water purification tables and stagnant swamp water, the Filipinos showed them the magic of the *buhuka* vine, which bloated itself with sweet, safe water and was easy to find.

Back at the camp, the Japanese were puzzled and furious, counting and recounting prisoners, and always coming up short. There were all manner of threats, and nobody could guess whether the "shooting squads" would suddenly appear. Rumor and Japanese curses and threats

flew through the camp. One Japanese interpreter known to the prisoners as "Running Wada" delivered an ominous oration, grim for all that it was missing the ever-elusive "L": "For every man who escape, de other nine in his squad wirr be shoot kirred. You are arr guilty of herping them escape."

And a great deal more of the same twaddle. There also were threats to execute the men who slept next to the vanished prisoners, and all of this blustering was threatening enough when it was delivered. In any event, there was no shooting of squad members, although the new American camp commander and the leaders of the escapers' barracks were severely beaten up.

The escapers were clear so far but moving very slowly, sometimes no more than three or four hundred yards in an hour, hacking their way through masses of trees and vines, knee-deep and deeper in water, pushing through huge clumps of *cogon*, a species of monstrous sword grass that ripped and tore skin and cloth at the slightest contact. Finally, they halted in the accompanying cloud of mosquitoes to discover they were traveling in circles. Regrouping, they pushed on, in spite of the fact that everybody was exhausted, McCoy was feeling symptoms of an onset of malaria, and they had to spend a half hour immersed in the foul swamp water to shelter from a cloud of large, angry wasps.

About at the bottom of their resources, they heard gunfire—single shots and automatic weapons. The weapons were not all Japanese, either, and the fight, whatever it was, could have been as near as a mile. The fighting told the escapers that direction was not one to take hastily. Instead, they halted briefly while Grashio led them in prayer, and a great calm descended on them all. Grashio knew what had happened: "I thought a miracle had occurred. I felt now that God would save us."

In short order, the exhausted Americans began to encounter fewer clumps of sword grass and shallower water. At last Jumarong found a trail and they soon arrived at the railroad; it looked like the Promised Land. It looked even better when they stumbled into a village and were warmly welcomed by the inhabitants. The escapers were fed a delicacy called a *baloot*, which is a chicken or duck egg, including a partially formed chick in a sort of jelly. It would have been impolite to refuse.

It got even better when they were confronted by a Filipino guerrilla sergeant named Casiano de Juan, hung all over with deadly weapons. After making sure the escapers weren't Japanese spies, he announced that "we are happy to see Americans." "Big boy," said Dyess, "we're a helluva lot happier to see you." From that moment on, to both Americans and guerrillas, Casiano de Juan would be forever-after "Big Boy."

Big Boy whistled, at which fifty-odd ragged guerrillas emerged from the shrubbery and a general welcome and celebration followed. In the general conversation that followed, it developed that the firefight heard by the escapers had been Casiano's boys ambushing a Japanese force apparently following the escapers. Guerrilla lookouts had seen "ten tall white men" followed by "Hapon" soldiers and drawn the right conclusions. The ambush had been a clean guerrilla victory, ten to nothing.

The escapers stayed on with the villagers, made over and fed as often as they wanted to eat. The Americans could wash themselves and their clothing, sleep as long as they chose. There was endless talk, and visitors from nearby villages came to see the Americans; Shofner exhibited photos he had taken on Corregidor and back in Shanghai and the Americans told tales of the Japanese horror. There was a plenteous supply of *tuba*, a sort of white lightning made from the coconut palm. Some villagers even asked the visitors to stand as godparents to their children.

The happy time ended when a Filipino sergeant appeared with an invitation from his captain, Laureta, and the escapers set off to see him, their progress a sort of traveling fiesta. There was music and dancing, and everybody sang, including the Americans. One evening ended with the Filipinos singing "God Bless America," and the Americans responding with "God Bless the Philippines."

They were passed on to the Filipino captain, who made them welcome and asked their advice. He showed them a letter purporting to be from US Army Lieutenant-Colonel Ernest McClish, who wrote that he commanded a substantial guerilla force and invited Laureta to join him. "I'd like to," said the captain, but he was afraid the letter was a Japanese ruse; they had tried to lure him into an ambush before. It's no hoax, said Mellnik, who knew McClish personally, at which Laureta asked whether the Americans would handle the contact with him. They would.

And so plans changed. Cateel town was a week's march away and McClish's headquarters somewhat farther, a tough hike over jungle and river and mountain; it was also headhunter country. The Americans felt they owed Laureta, however, who said he would help them out with their original escape plan if they could not reach McClish. And then there was a very interesting line in McClish's letter that said he had radio contact with Australia.

The expedition to find McClish departed with a strong guerrilla escort, and for a while Laureta led it. He turned back partway, and one of his lieutenants took over. The headhunters failed to materialize and finally, in a village called Loreto, they came upon a magic sight, an American flag hanging from what passed for city hall. At last they met another American *guerrillero*, Lieutenant Walter Mester, who passed them on to Captain Tom Baxter, who gave them directions to a place called Medina, where they would find McClish. Since only Shofner and McCoy had useful shoes by now, they became the messengers.

Another arduous trip got them to McClish's "division headquarters." Their reception was frosty at first, until McClish became convinced they were really escapers and bade them and Laureta's lieutenant a hearty welcome. It was *tuba* time. McClish turned out to be a thorough professional, an Oklahoma Choctaw who presided over a ragtag collection of fighters whose strength fluctuated from day to day. They were tough, however, and sufficiently organized to have their own newspaper, print their own money, even modify vehicles to run on the omnipresent *tuba*. Besides the Filipino guerrillas, there were many Americans from all the services, a number of civilians, and even a handful of British and other nationalities.

McClish immediately started promoting everybody. Probably the biggest jump was elevating the two Filipinos to sergeant from convicted-killer-serving-life. Later, Mellnik would travel to a New York sanitarium to have dying Philippine president Manuel Quezon sign formal pardons for de la Cruz and Jumarong.

The two American NCOs suddenly blossomed as second lieutenants. Everybody else got a one-grade jump, the Marines magically becoming officers in both the Marine Corps and the army. All that now remained was getting home, and that would be tough enough. There was more

arduous travel, although now they were in the company of both Filipino and American fighting men. Part of the journey to salvation was by water, part by land. But in the end, the plain evidence of salvation, the final miracle, was the rushing emergence of a US Navy submarine from the depths beside their small boat.

There were three such miracles, in July, September, and November of 1943, as the *Trout*, *Bowfin*, and *Narwhal*, alerted by radio, carried the escapers far out of harm's way. Dyess, Mellnik, and McCoy were first out, exhaustively questioned by intelligence personnel on their return but unable to get a national audience for their accounts of the almost unimaginable brutality of the Japanese.

Grashio boarded USS *Bowfin* in September of 1943, torn by conflicting emotions. He ached to see his country again, but he was deeply grieved to be leaving his friend Leo Boelens. Boelens could have returned to the States on *Bowfin* but chose to remain in the Philippines to organize construction of an airfield in the middle of nowhere, an alleged 1.4-million-square-foot monster. It would never be finished, for the Japanese caught up with him, shot him, and then stabbed him brutally and repeatedly.

He had lived only a month longer than Ed Dyess, who had gone back to his beloved fighters. Nobody knows precisely what happened, but although Dyess was an experienced pilot, he was flying the twin-engined P-38, very hot and new to him, and seems to have ignored at least part of his preflight check. As he took off for the first time, one engine began to backfire, probably the result of the low-test fuel used in training. But instead of braking, he tried to take off, the missing of the engine growing ever worse. Dyess reached about 200 feet, his wheels still down, slowing the fighter's speed still further.

Dyess, being the sort of man he was, would not bail out and let the P-38 crash into a crowded residential area. Instead, he tried to put the plane down on an empty street, but when a car unexpectedly drove below him, he changed direction to get the airplane down on a small vacant lot. It was in vain, and after all the risks and all the miles, Ed Dyess died instantly in the fighter's wreckage. It was three days before Christmas 1943.

Narwhal surfaced at a place called Nasipit and found a carnival atmosphere waiting. As she docked at the local pier, her crew was greeted by a

guerrilla band's version of "The Stars and Stripes Forever" and the sight of kegs of beer and roasted pig. As workers unloaded supplies destined for the guerillas, the band shifted over to "The Eyes of Texas" and "Yankee Doodle." Sailors raided their lockers, throwing the local people clothing, candy, and cigarettes. Dobervich tossed his shoes to a shoeless Filipino; Shofner gave his BAR — Browning Automatic Rifle — to McClish: "Big Boy will need this back."

And when the celebration was done and the farewells said, *Narwhal* pushed out to sea, carrying not only Dobervich, Shofner, and Hawkins but also thirty-some evacuees. The group included several women and children and at least one baby.

The story of the Philippine prison-camp horror had been suppressed by the government far too long, but it broke finally on Friday, January 29, 1944. The tales that Dyess, Mellnik, and McCoy had told so many months before were suddenly all over the papers and magazines. America was furious. "The American emotion," said *Newsweek*, "was a fury such as had never before gripped the nation in this war."

That the fury broke, even as late as it did, owed much to the gallantry and spirit of twelve men. The men who had died in Japanese captivity would be avenged.

In spades.

Chapter Eight

The Libby Prison Break of the American Civil War

Isaac N. Johnston

The battle of Chickamauga, one of the most stoutly contested of the war, may be said to have commenced on Friday, the 18th of September, 1863; but the heaviest fighting took place on Saturday and Sunday. We were outnumbered, as is well known; but, by the persistent courage of General Thomas and his brave associates, the enemy were foiled in their purpose—which was to retake Chattanooga—and the army saved from the disaster which at one time during the fight seemed inevitable. Bragg, it is true, claimed a glorious victory; but if battles are to be judged by their results, his victory was a fruitless one, the prize which was at stake remaining in our hands. True, we lost many brave men, and much of the material of war; but Chattanooga, the key of Georgia, was not wrested from our grasp; the valor of the troops, too, was never more nobly illustrated; for the stout men under Thomas stood unshaken on Mission Ridge as the wave-washed rock, against which the hitherto invincible legions of Longstreet, like fierce billows, madly dashed themselves, to fall back, like those broken billows, in foam and spray.

Men fell upon that field whose names never will perish, and others, who still live, there gained immortal renown. There fell Lytle, the poet-hero; sweet was his lyre, and strong was his sword. There the modest yet brave Thomas displayed the qualities of a great general, firm and undismayed amid carnage and threatened disaster; and there Garfield, the gallant and the good, won richly-deserved honor.

But to my own story. I had been unwell for several days, but the excitement of the conflict aroused and sustained me. Late on the evening of Saturday our brigade was ordered to retreat, and, unable to keep up with the main body, I was overtaken and captured. I was taken in charge by two lieutenants, and regret that I did not learn their names or command, as they treated me with marked kindness, as brave men ever treat a conquered foe. They saw, moreover, by my appearance, that I was quite ill, and this doubtless excited their sympathy. Soon another lieutenant came up; he was a Georgian, and drunk; he took away my sword-belt and haversack. Being cautioned by the others to take care of my watch, I slipped it down my back unobserved by my Georgia friend, and saved it for the time being.

My captors conducted me about a mile and a half to the rear, and kept me there all night. We had to pass over the ground that had been fought over during the day; it was thickly strewed with the dead and wounded of both armies; their dead seemed to be in the proportion of three to our one. I saw General Bragg for the first time at a distance. The night was intensely cold for the season, and I suffered severely, having lost my blanket; moreover, I was exhausted from hunger, having eaten nothing for two days. I was fortunate enough, however, to meet with a prisoner of the 9th Indiana, who generously gave me a cup of coffee and a cracker, after which I felt greatly refreshed. This noble fellow also shared his scanty covering with me, and I trust he may ever find a friend as kind as he proved to me. By morning the number of prisoners was quite large, most of them nearly starved; the men guarding us were very kind, and said they would gladly give us food, but they were as destitute and as hungry as ourselves. To prove their sincerity they marched us to a sweet-potato patch, and all hands, prisoners and guards, in army phrase, "pitched in." We then made fires and roasted the potatoes, and often since have made a worse meal. We were then marched across the Chickamauga River to a white house, where we found another lot of prisoners collected; our names were taken, and every man was relieved of his haversack; they were taken by a Texas captain, who distributed them to his own men.

This was Sunday, the 20th. About ten o'clock in the morning the battle commenced again, and we prisoners were ordered into rank and marched

in the direction of Ringgold. After an hour's march we were halted till about two in the afternoon, during which time there was another squad of prisoners marched to the rear and added to our number. During all this time the battle was raging furiously, and as the sound of the fierce conflict came to our ears there was the greatest anxiety on the part of our guard as well as ourselves. I had heard that Rosecrans had been heavily reinforced, and believing it to be true, was sanguine of success.

At two o'clock the captured officers, now numbering about one hundred and fifty, were ordered to fall in according to rank, non-commissioned officers and privates to follow. In this order we marched, stopping a few minutes to rest at the end of every hour, stimulated by the promise that we should draw rations as soon as we reached Ringgold. On our way we met one of Longstreet's brigades hurrying to the front; they were fine, soldierly-looking men, the very flower of the Confederate army, better drilled and equipped than any Southern troops I had seen, either at Shiloh or Stone River; they were confident, too, from their successes in Virginia; but they found their equals, at least, at Mission Ridge in the gallant men of the West. We reached Ringgold about nine o'clock at night, but failed to draw the promised rations, and were told if we would march four miles further we should come to the camp of a brigade of Longstreet's men, who were guarding a railroad station, and be sure to find the much-desired rations there. Many of us had been nearly worn out marching previous to the battle, and had passed through one day's fight; nevertheless, so hungry were we, that we were glad to drag our weary limbs four miles further, and in that distance wade the Chickamauga three times, in the hope of finding food, fire, and rest.

When within a short distance of the camp we were ordered to take rails from a fence to make fires to dry our clothes and make ourselves comfortable for the night. We were eager to avail ourselves of the liberty thus granted, and soon a column of men, about two thousand in number, each with from three to five rails on his shoulder, were marching on. About two o'clock in the morning, wet, dispirited, and weary, we reached camp, wincing somewhat under the burden of our rails, which grew heavier every step. Again we were doomed to disappointment; we found nothing there to relieve our hunger; so we kindled our fires, stretched

ourselves near them, and strove to forget the pangs of hunger and the bitterness of captivity in sleep.

On the morning of the 21st we were marched to Tunnel Hill, a distance of five miles. We remained there till 2 p.m., in which interval the long-desired rations of corn meal and bacon were issued. We asked for time to bake our bread and divide the meat, and were assured that we should have the opportunity we desired. Men were detailed to bake the bread and cut up the bacon, and in imagination we saw the long-expected and welcome meal prepared; but scarcely were our fires lighted and the meat divided, before we were again ordered into ranks, and obliged to leave nearly all our uncooked rations lying on the ground. To famishing men this was a severe trial; but orders were imperative, and with sad hearts we marched to the depot, where we found a train of cars awaiting our arrival. We got on board and reached Kingston, where we remained till morning. Here we met a brigade of Longstreet's men, who treated us with great kindness, many of them dividing their rations with us.

The same day we moved forward to Atlanta, which place we reached at 5 p.m. We found an immense crowd awaiting the arrival of the Yankees, and were stared at and criticised in a manner far from agreeable. Pity for our condition dwelt in the hearts of some, but they were forced to restrain any expression of sympathy; while those who came to jeer, and laugh, and to show their mean exultation, gratified their feelings to the fullest extent. Many citizens, both male and female, gratified their curiosity by calling to see us, doubtless expecting, from the reports they had heard, to see a race of beings far different from themselves. The next morning we were ordered to take the cars for Richmond.

Leaving Atlanta, we reached Augusta about twelve o'clock at night, and were marched to a church-yard, in which we camped till next morning. We were well treated by the citizens; many of them visited us, and showed us such kindness during our stay, that we could not but conclude that many of them, at heart, were lovers of the Union still. Nor was this the only occasion, while passing through the South, that we discovered strong symptoms of a Union sentiment among the people; many have secretly cherished the sacred flame, and will yet welcome the army of the Union as their deliverers. Leaving Augusta, we crossed the Savannah River into

South Carolina, passed through Raleigh, Weldon, and Petersburg, and on the 29th of September, about seven o'clock in the evening, we reached the depot at Richmond, and were marched to our Libby home.

During our trip from Chickamauga to Richmond the weather was clear and beautiful, but the nights were cold, and many of us, having lost our blankets, suffered much; for, in addition to the want of our usual covering, we were hungry nearly all the time. Many of the cities and towns through which we passed presented a pleasing appearance; but the country, for the most part, had a desolate look; few men were to be seen, save such as were too old for service, and the farming operations bore marks of neither care nor skill.

The officer who had the prisoners in charge was kind and gentlemanly, and rendered our situation as agreeable as was possible under the circumstances; that we suffered for food was no fault of his, and when we were turned over to the authorities at Richmond we parted from him with a feeling akin to regret.

All the private soldiers were sent to Belle Isle, a place which has become infamous on account of the cruel treatment to which they were subjected; but the officers had quarters assigned them in Libby Prison. This now world-famous building presents none of the outward characteristics of a prison, having been used in peaceful days as a warehouse; but none of the castles and dungeons of Europe, century old though they be, have a stranger or sadder history than this. There many a heart has been wrung, many a spirit broken, many a noble soul has there breathed out its last sigh, and hundreds who yet survive will shrink in their dreams, or shudder in their waking moments, when faithful memory brings back the scenes enacted within its fearful walls. The building is of brick, with a front of near one hundred and forty feet, and one hundred feet deep.

It is divided into nine rooms; the ceilings are low, and ventilation imperfect; the windows are barred, through which the windings of James River and the tents of Belle Isle may be seen. Its immediate surroundings are far from being agreeable; the sentinels pacing the streets constantly are unpleasant reminders that your stay is not a matter of choice; and were it so, few would choose it long as a boarding-house.

In this building were crowded about one thousand officers of nearly every grade, not one of whom was permitted to go out till exchanged or released by death. To men accustomed to an active life this mode of existence soon became exceedingly irksome, and innumerable methods were soon devised to make the hours pass less wearily. A penknife was made to do the duty of a complete set of tools, and it was marvelous to see the wonders achieved by that single instrument. Bone-work of strange device, and carving most elaborate, chess-men, spoons, pipes, all manner of articles, useful and ornamental, were fashioned by its aid alone. If a man's early education had been neglected, ample opportunities were now afforded to become a proficient scholar. The higher branches of learning had their professor; the languages, ancient and modern, were taught; mathematics received much attention; morals and religion were cared for in Bible classes, while the ornamental branches, such as dancing, vocal music, and sword exercise, had had their teachers and pupils. Indeed, few colleges in the land could boast of a faculty so large in number or varied in accomplishments, and none, certainly, could compare in the number of pupils.

But truth must be told; the minds of many of those grown-up, and, in some instances, gray-headed pupils, were not always with their books; their minds, when children, wandered from the page before them to the green fields, to streams abounding in fish, or pleasant for bathing; or to orchards, with fruit most inviting; but now the mind wandered in one direction—home. Others were deeply engaged in the mysteries of "poker" and "seven-up," and betting ran high; but they were bets involving neither loss or gain, and the winner of countless sums would often borrow a teaspoon full of salt or a pinch of pepper. Games of chess were played, which, judging from the wary and deliberate manner of the players, and the interest displayed by lookers-on, were as intricate and important as a military campaign; nor were the sports of children—jack-straws and mumble-peg—wanting; every device, serious and silly, was employed to hasten the slow hours along. But amid all these various occupations, there was one that took the precedence and absorbed all others—that was planning an escape. The exploits of Jack Sheppard, Baron Trenck, and the hero of Monte Cristo were seriously considered, and plans superior to theirs

concocted, some of them characterized by skill and cunning, others by the energy of despair.

One of these was as follows: After the arrival of the Chickamauga prisoners, a plot was made which embraced the escape of all confined in Libby, and the release of all the prisoners in and about Richmond. The leader in this enterprise was a man of cool purpose and great daring; and success, I doubt not, would have attended the effort had it not been that we had traitors in our midst who put the rebel authorities on the alert only a few days before the attempt was to have been made.

Our first plan of escape being thwarted, no time was lost in devising another, which, after many delays and interruptions of a very discouraging character, was finally crowned with success. Captain Hamilton, of the 12th Kentucky Cavalry, was the author of the plan, which he confided to Major Fitzsimmons, of the 30th Indiana, Captain Gallagher, of the 2d Ohio, and a third person, whose name it would not be prudent to mention, as he was recaptured. I greatly regret to pass him by with this brief allusion, as he had a very prominent part in the work from the beginning, and deserves far more credit than I have language to express. As this, however, is one of the most wonderful escapes on record, when its complete history is written he will not be forgotten. John Morgan's escape from the Ohio Penitentiary has been thought to have suggested our plan, and to have equaled it in ingenuity and risk. His difficulties, however, ended when he emerged from the tunnel by which he escaped, while ours may be said to have only begun when we reached the free air, and every step till we reached the Union lines was fraught with great danger.

After Captain Hamilton's plans had been intrusted to and adopted by the gentlemen above named, a solemn pledge was taken to reveal them to none others, and at an early date in December 1863, the work was begun.

In order to a perfect understanding of it, a more minute description of the building is necessary. It is not far from one hundred and forty feet by one hundred and ten, three stories high, and divided into three departments by heavy brick walls. The divisions were occupied as follows: The two upper east rooms by the Potomac officers, the two middle upper rooms by those captured at Chickamauga, the two west upper rooms by the officers of Colonel Streight's and General Milroy's command; the

lower room of the east division was used as a hospital, the lower middle room for a cook and dining-room, and the lower west is divided into several apartments which were occupied by the rebel officers in command. There is also a cellar under each of these divisions; the east cellar was used for commissary stores, such as meal, turnips, fodder, and straw—the latter article was of vast benefit in effecting our escape. The rear and darker part of the middle cellar was cut up into cells, to which were consigned those of our number who were guilty of infractions of the rules of prison—dungeons dark and horrible beyond description. The portion of it in front was used as a workshop, and the west cellar was used for cooking the rations of private soldiers who were confined in other buildings, and as quarters for some negro captives who were kept to do the drudgery of the prison.

As the plan was to dig out, it became necessary to find a way into the east cellar, from which to begin our tunnel, which was accomplished as follows. Near the north end of the dining-room was a fireplace, around which three large cooking stoves were arranged. In this fireplace the work began. The bricks were skillfully taken out, and through this aperture a descent to the east cellar was effected. This part of the work was intrusted to Captains Hamilton and Gallagher, who were both house-builders, and in their hands it was a perfect success. The only tools used were pocket-knives; consequently their progress was slow, and fifteen nights elapsed before the place was reached where the tunnel was to begin. The stoves mentioned above aided greatly in the prosecution of the work, screening the operators from observation. Immediately in front of them the prisoners had a dancing party nearly every night, and the light of their tallow candles made the stoves throw a dark shadow over the entrance to the newly-opened way to the cellar, and the mirth of the dancers drowned any slight noise that might be made by the working party. Considerable skill was necessary in order to reach the cellar after the opening was made; and on one occasion one of the party stuck fast, and was released only by great efforts on the part of his associates. Poor fellow! Though fortunate enough to escape detection in this instance, and afterward to reach the free air, he was recaptured and taken back to a confinement more intolerable than before.

The cellar being reached, a thorough examination was made in order to decide upon a route which would be most favorable for our escape; and it was determined to make an attempt in the rear of a cook-room which was in the south-east corner of the cellar. The plan was to dig down and pass under the foundation, then change the direction and work parallel with the wall to a large sewer that passes down Canal Street, and from thence make our escape. The attempt was accordingly made; but it was soon discovered that the building rested upon ponderous oak timbers, below which they could not penetrate. Determined to succeed, they began the seemingly-hopeless task of cutting through these; pocket-knives and saws made out of case-knives were the only available tools; and when this, after much hard labor, was effected, they were met by an unforeseen and still more serious difficulty. Water began to flow into the tunnel; a depth below the level of the canal had been reached, and sadly they were compelled to abandon the undertaking. A second effort was made; a tunnel was started in the rear of the cook-room mentioned above, intended to strike a small sewer which started from the south-east corner, and passing through the outer wall to the large sewer in front. Some sixteen or eighteen feet brought the tunnel under a brick furnace, in which were built several large kettles used in making soup for prisoners. This partially caved in, and fear of discovery caused this route to be abandoned.

With a determination to succeed, which no difficulty could weaken or disappointment overcome, another attempt, far more difficult than the preceding, was made. A portion of the stone floor of the cook-room was taken up, and the place supplied by a neatly-fitting board, which could be easily removed; and through this the working party descended every night. The plan was to escape by the sewer leading from the kitchen, but it was not large enough for a man to pass through; but as the route seemed preferable to any other, it was determined to remove the plank with which it was lined; and this out of the way, the tunnel or aperture would be sufficiently large. The old knives and saws were called for, and the work of removing the plank was continued for several days with flattering success, till it was concluded that another hour's work would enable us to enter the large sewer in front, into which this led, and thus escape. So strong was the conviction that the work would be completed in a little time, that

all who knew the work was going on made preparation to escape on the night of the 26th of January.

After working on the night of the 25th, two men were left down in the cellar to cover up all traces of the work during the day, and as soon as it was dark to complete the work—to go into the large sewer, explore it, and have everything ready by eight or nine o'clock, at which time the bricks would be removed from the hole leading into the cellar, which had to be placed carefully in their original position every night, from the beginning to the completion of the work. When the last brick was removed, a rope-ladder, which had been prepared for the occasion, was passed down and made fast to a bar of iron, placed across the front of the fireplace. Now came long moments of breathless silence and agonizing suspense, all waiting for the assurance from one of the men below that all was ready. He came at last; but, alas! his first whisper was, "bad news, bad news;" and bad news, indeed, it proved. It was found that the remaining portion of the plank to be removed was oak, two inches thick, and impossible to be removed by the tools which had heretofore been used; moreover, the water was rapidly finding its way into the tunnel, and all the labor expended had been in vain. The feelings of that little band who can describe!—from hopes almost as bright as reality they were suddenly plunged into the depths of despair.

Nearly all the work above mentioned was performed by Captains Hamilton and Gallagher, Major Fitzsimmons, and another officer. As a natural consequence, they were worn-out by excessive labor, anxiety, and loss of sleep, that being the thirty-ninth night of unremitting toil. They were, however, still unconquered in spirit, and declared that another attempt must be made as soon as they were sufficiently recruited to enter upon it. Noble fellows! hard had they toiled for liberty, and it came at last.

While the party last named were resting, there were others not inactive. Captain Clark, of the Seventy-Third Illinois, Major McDonald, of the One Hundredth Ohio, Captain Lucas, of the Fifth Kentucky, Lieutenant Fislar, of the Seventh Indiana Battery, and myself, proposed to the originators of the plan of escape, that we would commence at some other point, and push on the work till they were sufficiently recruited to unite

with us. This meeting with their approval, on the following night Major McDonald and Captain Clark went down and commenced operations.

The plan was to begin a new tunnel in the cellar on the east side, near the north-east corner of the building. The first thing to be done was to make a hole through the brick wall, which they effected in one day and night. This was done by picking the cement from between the bricks with a penknife, and then breaking them out with an old ax. This, of course, made considerable noise, and was calculated to arrest the attention of the guards; but it happened, providentially, as it seemed to us, that just at that time the authorities of the prison determined to place iron grates in all the windows, to render the escape of the Yankees impossible. This was accompanied by great noise; and while they were thus engaged our boys thumped away with a will, and made their way through the wall without exciting the least suspicion. The night after the breach was made, Lieutenant Fislar and myself went down to work; but having nothing but a small penknife, our progress was, of necessity, very slow. In spite of all difficulties, however, we made an excavation of about two feet, and felt that we were that much nearer freedom. We remained in the cellar all the next day, and at night were relieved by two others; and thus the work was continued from night to night, till its completion. One of our number remained in the cellar every day to remove all signs of the previous night's work, and to replace the bricks in the cavity made in the wall, to avoid discovery, as some of the prison officials or laborers came into the cellar every day, either bringing in or taking out forage or commissary stores.

I have been asked a thousand times how we contrived to hide such a quantity of earth as the digging of a tunnel of that size would dislodge. There was a large pile of straw stored in the cellar for hospital use; in this we made a wide and deep opening, extending to the ground; in this the loose dirt was closely packed, and then nicely covered with straw.

As the work progressed from night to night, and our hopes increased with the length of our tunnel, the number of laborers was increased, till the working party numbered fourteen. This was the more necessary, as the work of removing the loose dirt increased with every foot we advanced. I have often been asked how we managed to get the dirt out of the tunnel, which was too narrow to permit a man to turn round in it. As the

whole process was somewhat novel, one in all probability never attempted before, I will describe it for the benefit of the readers.

Our dirt-car was a wooden spittoon, with holes through each end opposite each other, through which ropes were passed; one of these ropes was used by the one engaged in digging, to draw the empty spittoon from the entrance to the place where he was at work; and when he had loosened earth enough to fill it, he gave a signal to the one at the mouth of the tunnel by jerking the rope, and he drew the loaded box out, and the miner recovered it by pulling the rope attached to the end of the box nearest him; thus it was kept traveling backward and forward till wagon-loads of earth were removed. After penetrating some distance the task became very painful; it was impossible to breathe the air of the tunnel for many minutes together; the miner, however, would dig as long as his strength would allow, or till his candle was extinguished by the foul air; he would then make his way out, and another would take his place—a place narrow, dark, and damp, and more like a grave than any place can be short of a man's last narrow home.

As the work approached completion the difficulty of breathing in the tunnel was greatly increased, and four persons were necessary to keep the work moving; one would go in and dig awhile, then when he came out nearly exhausted another would enter and fill the spittoon, a third would draw it to the mouth of the tunnel, a fourth would then empty the contents into a large box provided for the purpose, and when it was full, take it to the straw pile and carefully conceal it, as before stated. This labor, too, it must be remembered, was not only extremely difficult in itself, and especially so when the imperfect tools and means of removing the earth are taken into the account; but in addition to this was the constant anxiety lest the attempt we were making should be discovered. Moreover, the fact that all previous attempts had failed was calculated at times to fill our minds with fears lest some unforeseen obstacle should occur to prevent the success of our enterprise. On the other hand, however, the hard fare and confinement of our prison, the monotony of which had become unendurable, and the possibility of escape at last roused us up to exertions almost superhuman. Under any other circumstances the work would have been deemed impossible; but there are no impossibilities to men with liberty as the result of their labors.

Before the work was completed, those who had been engaged in the previous attempt had recovered from their exhaustion, and were able to take part in this, which, in the end, proved successful. But what is to be most regretted is, that though all of them regained the liberty for which they so patiently toiled, one of them was recaptured—the one, too, who, of all others, the rest confidently believed would escape, if escape were in the power of man. What he has since suffered we can only conjecture; but the disappointment must have been most sad to his great heart—to have gained the free air, and almost in sight of the flag of the Union—to be recaptured and borne back to a captivity more hopeless than before.

I have also been asked frequently since my escape, how it was possible for a man to be left down in the cellar every day without being discovered. Such a thing seems strange; but the entire work was a marvelous one, and this was a necessary part of it; and though the officers, or other persons employed about the prison, visited the cellar every day, yet for fifty-one days one or another of our company was down there without being discovered. The duty of the one left there was to remove all traces of the work of the previous night, as soon as it became light enough to do so; he would then conceal himself for the day in the straw, of which there was a large quantity there, and but for which our undertaking must have been discovered nearly as soon as begun. To account for the absence of those persons required some ingenuity, as two of our number were sometimes on duty at once in the cellar. This was managed as follows: the officers were drawn up in four ranks, and the clerk counted them from right to left; one, two, or three, as the case might be, would change their places so as to be counted twice; the number being all right, the clerk was deceived.

This, however, was suddenly brought to an end. Some of the officers had succeeded in obtaining citizens' clothes, and passed the guards without suspicion and escaped; one or two also escaped by disguising themselves in the Confederate uniform. After this we were all collected into the two east rooms, and required to answer to our names.

About the time the change was made Major McDonald and Lieutenant McKee were on duty in the cellar, and failed to answer to their names; this caused quite a stir, and for some time it was thought that they had escaped by a trick similar to that of the others. The next day they were

reported by someone as being present—perhaps the clerk, who knew that the Major, particularly, would bear watching. The consequence was they were both called down to the office to render to Major Turner the reasons for their absence on the previous day. The Lieutenant, with an air of perfect innocence, stated that, feeling quite unwell, he had wrapped himself up in his blanket, had fallen asleep, did not hear the order for roll-call, and was overlooked. His excuse was deemed valid, and he was immediately sent back to his quarters. The Major was not so fortunate; the fact is, he was regarded as a suspicious character, and in consequence had a severer ordeal to pass. The question, "Major, your reason for non-attendance at roll-call yesterday," was put quite laconically. Said he, "I happened to be in Colonel Streight's room, and failed to get back in time."

"In Col. Streight's room, indeed! How did you get in there, sir?"

That I may be understood better, it is necessary to state that some time previous some of the officers of Colonel Streight's command had given much trouble to the authorities of the prison, by being in our room at roll-call; and, in order to prevent a similar occurrence, had nailed up the door between the rooms occupied by the Chickamauga officers, and those captured with Colonel Streight. The door had not been nailed up half an hour before some quick-witted fellow sawed the door completely in two below the lock, extracted the nails, placed some benches near the door so as to conceal the crack, and we were thus able to pass in and out at pleasure. The occupants of the other room took good care that the traces of the saw should be concealed on their side, and thus free intercourse was kept between both rooms without being suspected.

The Major, with great seeming candor, explained the trick which accounted for his presence in the forbidden room; and the next question was, "How did it happen that the officer of the day and the clerk did not see you there when they came in to see if that room was cleared before commencing to call the roll?" This would have been a poser to many—not so to the Major, who readily replied, that, being in the wrong room, not wishing to be found there, and being compelled to disclose the means by which he entered, he had climbed up on the plate or girder that passed through the room; "and when the search for me began," said he, "I laid there close to the timber for ten hours, and would have melted, drop by

drop, before I would discover myself, and subject the officers in that room to censure, and cause all intercourse between the two rooms to be cut off."

His questioners seemed rather to doubt his excuse, ingenious though it was; but as they were ignorant of the true state of the case, and he reaffirmed his story so positively, he was dismissed to his quarters with a reprimand and an admonition.

The day after this occurred it was my turn to stand guard in the cellar. At quite an early hour the roll was called, and there being no one willing to run the risk of answering for me, my absence was discovered. There were several, it is true, who would willingly have answered for me, but they were so well known, and somewhat suspected, which would have rendered it dangerous to them, and of no benefit to me. The fact of my absence made it necessary for the calling of the roll several times in succession; all the officers were kept in rank, confined in one room, till three o'clock in the afternoon, and diligent search was made for me in every room in the building; and it was finally concluded that I had made my escape. At night, when the working party came down, they informed me of what had taken place; and upon consultation it was thought best that I should remain down in the cellar till the tunnel was completed. To remain in this cold, dark, and loathsome place was most revolting to my feelings; but the fear of being handcuffed and put in the dungeon if I returned to my room, and the hope of gaining my liberty shortly, induced me to stay. After agreeing to stay down, it was suggested that I might with safety go up to my quarters after lights were out, and sleep till four o'clock in the morning, and go down again when the working party came up. I did so; but the first night I was seen, either by some traitor, or very careless prisoner, not acquainted with our secret, who stated at roll-call the next morning, that I was in the house, as he had seen me go to bed the night before—which was really the case. The result was that the roll was called several times, and another careful search for me was instituted. Great excitement prevailed through the prison; those of our own men who knew nothing of the plan of escape, and the place of my concealment, thought that I was hiding in some of the rooms, and thought it very wrong of me to do so; they even said that I ought to come out of my hiding-place and give myself up, as they, though innocent, were suffering on my account. On the

contrary, those who knew where I was declared that it was impossible that I could be in the building, after the strict search that had been made for me; and as others were known to have made their escape recently, it was more than likely that I had done the same.

This was corroborated by Lieutenant Fislar, who improvised a story to fit the case. He said that he was my messmate and sleeping-companion —which was true; but that I had been missing from my usual place for some time, and he had no doubt but that I had escaped. He said, moreover, that two of my cousins were among our guards—that I had been courting their favor for some time, and that they had finally furnished me with a rebel uniform—that I had made a wooden sword, a tin scabbard, and a belt out of a piece of oil-cloth, and that they had eventually passed me out as a rebel officer.

This story was taken up and so stoutly confirmed by all who knew where I was, that the point was yielded by most of the opposite view, though a few still contended that I must be in the prison still.

All this was related to me by the working party when they came down at night, and I then resolved to make my appearance at my quarters no more. This resolution I have kept faithfully. I never saw my room again, and never desire to do so, unless it be as the bearer of freedom to those who are pining there still.

The cellar was now my home. I was fed by my companions, who nightly brought me down a portion of their own scanty fare. Had I been discovered by the authorities of the prison it would have gone hard with me; and knowing this, the greatest sympathy was manifested by my associates, who felt that this danger was incurred not less for their advantage than my own.

Everything moved on as well as could be expected. I had plenty of company—little of it, however, agreeable, as it consisted of rebels, rats, and other vermin. With the former I had no communication whatever; whenever they made their appearance I leaped quickly into a hole I had prepared in the straw, and pulled the hole in after me, or nearly so, at least, by drawing the straw over me so thickly that I could scarcely breathe. The rats gave me no annoyance, save when making more noise than usual, they startled me by making the impression that my two-legged enemies were

near; the remaining nuisance, which shall be nameless, was one which all prisoners will ever remember with loathing, and from which there was neither respite nor escape.

The night of the seventh of February came, and it was thought that our tunnel was long enough to reach the inside of a tobacco-shed on the opposite side of the street, under which it passed. We made our calculation in the following manner: Captain Gallagher had obtained permission to go to a building across the street, where the boxes sent from the North to the prisoners were stored, to obtain some of the perishable articles; and while crossing the street he measured the distance, as accurately as possible, by stepping it both ways, and came to the conclusion that fifty-two or fifty-three feet would bring us to the shed. On measuring the tunnel it was found to be fifty-three feet long, and we fondly hoped that our labors were ended, with the exception of a few feet upward to the light. So confident were we that the work could be completed in an hour or two, that we had our rations already prepared in our haversacks, fully expecting to begin going out at nine o'clock—nay, we even went so far as to communicate the success of our plan to many who had not been partakers in the labor or the secret of the undertaking, but whom we invited to become the companions of our flight. When all were thus expectant, all thinking that the long-wished-for hour had come, Captain Randall, of the Second Ohio, was appointed to open up the way to light and liberty.

It was agreed that the mining party, who had labored so faithfully, should go out first, and that our friends should follow; and we stood anxiously awaiting the return of Captain Randell, with the news that the way was open. There are times when minutes seem lengthened into hours—this was one of them. The suspense began to be painful; it seemed as if we could hear the beatings of each other's hearts, as well as feel the throbbings of our own, and the unspoken question on every lip was, Will he succeed? At length he emerged from the tunnel, and, in answer to the question, "What success?" in an excited tone and manner he replied, "All is lost!" We gathered round him, and when he became somewhat calmer he spoke as follows: "I have made an opening, but a large stone which lay on the surface fell into the tunnel, making considerable noise; the hole, too, was on the outside of the shed, and within a few feet of the sentinel

who was on guard; he heard the noise, and called the attention of the other sentinel to it; the light from the hospital shone upon the side of the shed; I could see both the guards walking toward the spot; I have no doubt they have discovered the tunnel, and perhaps will soon be in here to arrest us."

Imagine, if you can, our feelings; our bright hopes so suddenly crushed, and every one in expectation that the guard would soon be upon us. Great excitement prevailed, yet no one was able to suggest how to act in this sudden and unexpected emergency.

Amid all the excitement, however, incident to such an occasion, there was much sympathy felt in my behalf. I had been missing for some time, and was supposed to have made my escape; to be discovered now, as seemed inevitable, would be proof that I had much to do with the attempt to escape, and would subject me, at the very least, to the dungeon and handcuffs. In a few moments the cellar was nearly cleared, most of the party returning to their quarters in the different rooms above; but Major McDonald and Captain Hamilton remained with me, determined, if they could not aid me, at least to share the same fate. Noble, self-sacrificing men! Their conduct proved that disinterested friendship and high, chivalrous feeling have not yet departed.

After all was quiet the Major determined to go upstairs and make what discoveries he could. He soon returned, saying he had been up to the upper east room, from which he could see the sentinels very distinctly; and, from all appearances, he concluded that they had not discovered the hole. I advised him to go into the tunnel and examine the breach, and stop it up if possible, as it was not at the right place to render our escape at all likely, being outside of the shed instead of inside, as was intended, and within a few feet of the guard. If the hole could not be stopped, of course it exposed us to certain discovery in the morning; and I proposed to go in and enlarge it, and, great as was the risk, try to make my escape at all hazards; for if I should fail, I would rather be caught in the attempt than wait to be found in the cellar or my quarters. When the Major returned he reported favorably, saying that the breach might be repaired. An old pair of pantaloons were procured and stuffed full of earth; some dirt, too, was put on the outside of them, so that the cloth could not be seen, and thus

excite suspicion. These were forced into the aperture, and earth pressed in beneath; and he returned greatly elated with the hope that all danger was past, and that in one or two more nights our labors would be crowned with success.

After a few minutes' consultation it was agreed that I should remain in the cellar till the next night. All the next day a close watch was kept, by some of our number in the east room, on the guards who were stationed near the place where our tunnel ended. There was no token, however, that any discovery had been made, and the next night the mining operations were resumed, and between two and three o'clock in the morning an opening was made to the free air, this time inside of the shed, at the very point we desired, at a distance of fifty-seven feet from the point of starting. The tunnel was about two feet wide by two feet and a half deep; it was arched above; and Lieutenant Davy, who is a practical miner, declared that it was done in a workmanlike manner. We found a very hard, compact sand all along the route; the loose earth was disposed of as I have before stated, till within about ten feet of the end, when it was strewn along the entire length, thus reducing very considerably the size of the passage. Near the terminus it was rather a close fit for a large man, and when I was passing through I stuck fast, and had to call on Major Fitzsimmons to pull me out of a very tight place.

The principal tool used in this work was a chisel, which was found among some rubbish in the cellar, a handle for which was made from a piece of stove-wood.

When the surface was reached there was too little of the night remaining to effect our escape; two of our number, however, passed out and explored the lot, and planned the course to be taken after emerging from the tunnel. The shed in which our labors terminated fronted the canal; between them was a brick building, through the center of which there was a passage into the lot, closed by a gate; and the route fixed upon was through this passage. The question then arose, who shall go out first? Some thought that I was entitled to that honor, as I had been confined so long in the cellar, and had incurred more risk than the rest. Others thought that, though to go out first might be esteemed the post of honor, it was also the post of danger, as the first would run more risk than those

who should follow. It was finally agreed that I should be the fifth to pass out, and that Lieutenant Fislar should be my partner in flight. Then arose the question, how the aperture through the surface should be concealed till the next night; for should anyone go into the shed during the day, as was most probable, our plan might yet be frustrated. A piece of plank was found, and Captain Hamilton dispatched with it to the outer end of the tunnel, over which he placed it, being careful, however, to bury it just below the surface, and to cover it with dry earth. He soon returned, having successfully accomplished his task; and all retired to their quarters, leaving me in the cellar to cover up all traces of their work—cheered by the thought that with night would come liberty.

It came at last—the last night, the night of release; and the working party was assembled in the cellar for the last time. There was a shade of sadness on many a brow; for we were about to go forth two by two, to separate to meet again—when? Perhaps never! The party consisted of:

Colonel Rose, 77th Pennsylvania Infantry.

Major Fitzsimmons, 30th Indiana Infantry.

Captain Hamilton, 12th Kentucky Cavalry.

Captain Gallagher, 2d Ohio Volunteer Infantry.

Captain Clark, 79th Illinois Volunteer Infantry.

Captain Lucas, 5th Kentucky Volunteer Infantry.

Major McDonald, 100th Ohio Volunteer Infantry.

Captain Randell, 2d Ohio Volunteer Infantry.

Captain Johnston, 6th Kentucky Volunteer Infantry.

Lieutenant Fislar, 7th Indiana Battery.

Lieutenant Simpson, 10th Indiana Infantry.

Lieutenant Mitchell, 79th Illinois Infantry.

Lieutenant Davy, 77th Pennsylvania Infantry.

Lieutenant Sterling, 29th Indiana Infantry.

Lieutenant Foster, 30th Indiana Infantry.

It was agreed that ten minutes should elapse after the first two passed out, before the second couple should start. Lieutenant Fislar and myself were the third couple. After emerging from the tunnel we faced to the right, and passed across the lot to the passage through the brick building, already described, into the street; and in doing so we passed within forty feet of the sentinels. We were not observed, and you may be sure we did not linger, and soon we were out of sight of the hated place.

One hundred and nine persons thus escaped from eight o'clock at night to three in the morning, notwithstanding that the night was clear and beautiful, and all had to pass between two gas lights; of these, however, only about one half succeeded in reaching the Federal lines.

As my comrade and myself were passing through the city, two ladies, who were standing at the gate of a house which stood back from the street, observed us; one of them remarked to the other that we looked like Yankees. We did not stop to undeceive them, and met with no further trouble till the city limits were passed. We then changed our course and traveled north-east, and soon came to the rebel camps, which stretched round a great portion of the city. We were excited, of course, and bewildered for the first hour, not knowing whether we were in the path of safety or danger. All at once I became perfectly composed, and told my comrade to follow me and I would conduct him safe through. I then started due north, taking the north star for my guide, changing my course only when we came near any of the camps, sufficiently to avoid them. After traveling three or four miles we saw another camp ahead, and thinking that the camps possibly did not connect, we determined to attempt to pass between them. As we approached, however, we found out our mistake—the camps were connected by a chain of sentinels, and this chain must be passed before escape became even probable.

We advanced cautiously, and when we reached a small ravine we could hear the sentinel, on his beat, on the other side. We saw his fire, too, which we, of course, avoided; and at one time only a few small bushes were

between us and the guard; the wind, however, was blowing briskly, causing quite a rustling among the dry leaves, and we succeeded in getting by safely. We moved on rapidly, and soon came near the cavalry pickets; these we passed without difficulty. After continuing our course north for some time, we changed to north-east, and passed over four lines of the rebel defenses. It was our intention to strike the Chickahominy above the railroad bridge; but, to our surprise, we struck the railroad on the Richmond side.

We then traveled down the road about a mile, and as day began to dawn we left the road a short distance to find a hiding-place, expecting that with the coming of light there would be a keen search made for us. The rebel fortifications were near; in front of them all the timber had been felled, and among this timber was our hiding-place the first day—all the safer, too, no doubt, for being within a few hundred yards of the rebel guns. The weather was excessively cold; we had walked during the night over bad roads, through mud and water, and our pantaloons were frozen stiff up to our knees. We did not dare to make a fire so near the rebel camp, for fear of discovery; but our suffering was greatly lessened by the thought that we were free.

As soon as it was light enough to see, we made the rather unpleasant discovery that there was a picket-guard not more than one hundred and fifty yards from the place where we had taken refuge; and soon two working parties came out from the fortifications, and began to cut cord-wood. These two parties, with the picket-guard, formed a triangle—the wood-choppers on each side, the guards in front; so that we were obliged, half frozen though we were, to lay very close to the ground till kind and merciful Night, who kindly lends her mantle to escaped prisoners, should come.

This, the first day of our escape, was a long one, full of anxiety and fears, lest, after all our toils, we should be retaken and subjected to a captivity far worse than we had experienced before. About sundown the working party withdrew, and soon after nightfall we resumed our journey, again toward the north star. We had scarcely got fairly started before our ears were saluted by the tramp of horses and the clank of sabers; we immediately left the road and lay down behind some brushwood. It proved to be a scouting party, perhaps in pursuit of us; but we let them pass unchallenged.

We continued our course till we reached the Chickahominy River; going up the stream a short distance we found a log across it, passed over and kept our course for several miles, then changed our course northeast, and traveled till nearly daylight. We camped for the day by the side of a swamp, under a large pine-tree, near the foot of which was a thick cedar bush, whose shade we found most welcome, as it afforded us concealment and shelter from the bleak wind. The night had been very cold, and having crossed several swamps in our journey, our feet were wet, and our clothes frozen, as, indeed, was the case, day and night, till we reached the Union lines.

On the night of the eleventh we traveled east, and crossed the railroad about half-past eight o'clock; we also crossed the main road from Richmond to Williamsburg, and two or three other roads, all leading into the main road from the Chickahominy, and just before day went into a hiding-place near one of these roads. As soon as it was light we saw that our place of rest was not well chosen; that scouts, or anyone in pursuit of us, could come close upon us before we could see them; we therefore sought another place, from which we could see to a considerable distance in every direction.

We were careful to shun everything in the shape of a man, whether black or white; but after traveling through swamps and thickets, on the fourth night we came to a path along which a negro man was passing; we stopped him and asked a number of questions, and were convinced, from his answers, that he was a friend, and might be trusted. We then told him our condition, and asked him if he could give us something to eat. He said that he was not near home, or he would do so cheerfully; but pointing to a house in the distance, to which he said he was going, assured us that friends lived there, and if we would go with him our wants should be supplied. He said the people who lived there were Union folks, and that we need not fear; but we had suffered so much that we did not feel inclined to trust strangers; however, I asked him to go to the house and see if any rebel soldiers were there. This he did readily, and soon returned, telling us to come on, that the way was clear, and supper, such as they had, would soon be prepared for us. I then asked him if he would stand guard while we went in, as I was still fearful of being retaken. He agreed

to do so. We then entered the house, found a good fire, and some friendly faces; and the inmates set about preparing supper for us with all speed. We happened to have a little coffee with us, the very thing of which they seemed most in need. We added this to their store, and soon we had the first good meal we had taken for months before us, and a cheery cup of hot coffee, which made it seem a feast. After the meal was ended, being fully satisfied that the people were friends, and our black friend outside faithful, we rested awhile, which we certainly needed, if ever men did, and gave to our kind entertainers all that we could—our heart-felt thanks. When we were ready to start, the faithful negro sentinel, who had stood guard for us, offered to be our guide, and conducted us about four miles on our journey; he advised us to cross to the north side of the road, as we should meet with fewer swamps, and consequently make better progress.

We then traveled on till daylight, and stopped, as usual, for the day; but our clothes were so wet and frozen that we were obliged to travel on to keep from being perfectly benumbed with cold. We had not traveled any in the daytime before, and began to think that we were out of danger; still, we kept a vigilant watch, but met with no interruption, and we gradually became bolder. About sundown we saw before us a negro chopping wood; and as he was directly in our line of march, and our adventure of the previous night had given us confidence in those having black skins, we walked directly toward him, intending to inquire about the roads, the position of the rebel pickets, the movements of scouting parties, and other matters of interest. Judge of our surprise, however, when we came within a few paces of him, to find a white man with him, seated at the foot of a tree! It was too late to change our course, as he evidently saw us; so we went up to him and inquired how far it was to Barnesville, a small town we had passed a few miles back. He answered us civilly, and we asked several other questions, which he replied to satisfactorily. He gave us to understand, however, that he recognized us as Union soldiers. We told him that was not the case, but that we were Confederate scouts in disguise, and asked him if he had, during the past few days, seen any Yankees in that vicinity. He said that he had not, and insisted that we were Federal soldiers ourselves. At length I told him we were, and that we had escaped from Libby Prison. He protested that he was glad to see us,

had heard of the escape of the Libby prisoners, but did not credit it—but must believe it now, as he had the living witnesses before him. He talked freely with us, saying, among other things, that he was a citizen, and had taken no part whatever in the war, and even expressed the wish that we might make our escape.

I told him that I expected, as soon as we were gone, that he would go to the nearest picket-post and inform his rebel friends what course we had taken. He declared that he had no such intention, and repeated the wish that we might have a safe journey. I then asked him if he knew of any pickets near. He replied there were none nearer than Burnt Ordinary, which was some miles distant, and that he had not seen a Confederate soldier for three weeks—in fact, that they seldom came in that direction. The truth was, as we soon discovered, there was a picket-post not more than half a mile from the place where we stood. This he well knew, and did his utmost to betray us into their hands. He advised us to follow a certain path, by doing which he said we should avoid a swamp that it was difficult and dangerous to cross, and even went with us a short distance to see that we did not take the wrong path. I could not, however, resist the conviction that he was treacherous, and did all I could to impress him with a salutary fear, telling him that if he informed on us, there was a certain General Butler, of whom he had doubtless heard, who had a way of finding such things out; and if anything happened to us he would doubtless send out a detachment that would destroy everything that he had. If, however, he conducted himself as a quiet, peaceable citizen, he and his property would be respected. He assured us that no harm should come to us through him, shook hands with us, and wished us again a safe journey.

We had not gone over a hundred yards, when happening to look back, I saw our friend traveling at a pace quite unnecessary for one so friendly, and the whole matter flashed on my mind. I turned to my comrade and said, "We are gone up; that scoundrel, I feel certain, has gone to report us to the nearest picket-guard!"

So well assured did I feel of his treachery, that I proposed that we should change our course from south to east, which we did immediately—and then almost too late. We had not pursued our new course more than half a mile when we heard voices of men talking in a low yet earnest tone;

we stopped and listened; it was even as I had suspected—the professed friend, from whom we had recently parted, had gone to the nearest pickets, informed the rebels who we were, and how we might be intercepted; and the officer was now placing his men on the road near where we were expected to cross, and we were now within fifteen or twenty paces of them—they, aware of our coming, wary and watchful. It was a moment of fearful suspense; we were screened from view, however, by the bushes; and our only chance was to change our course; we started, but the rustling of the dry leaves beneath our feet betrayed us, and we were sternly ordered to come out of the brush.

We hesitated, and the order was repeated in fierce, quick tones, which was accompanied by a volley of musketry. On this we came out at a double-quick, but in a direction opposite to that which we were thus rudely invited—in other words, we broke away and ran for life. With a shout our enemies joined in the pursuit, and pressed us so closely that I was obliged to throw away my overcoat, and Lieutenant Fislar lost his cap. On came our pursuers, nearer and nearer, till, at length, in order to save ourselves, we had to take refuge in a large swamp. Orders were given to surround it, and we could hear men on every side calling to each other, and giving direction how to prevent our escape—and all this when liberty was almost in our grasp; for we were then but three miles from the Federal lines.

While thus lying concealed in the swamp our reflections were not of the most agreeable character. We had almost reached the reward of much toil and suffering; we had even begun to think and talk of home and the loved ones there; and now, by the baseness of one of our fellow-beings, to lose the prize almost in our grasp, was too painful a thought to be calmly endured. We contrasted the duplicity—nay, almost perjury, of the civilized white man who had betrayed us into the power of our enemies, with the fidelity of the African slave who had proved so kind and true, and felt that under the dark skin beat the nobler heart. The one, of our own race, in violation of promises the most solemn, would have given us back to a fate worse than death; the other, of another and despised race, did all in his power to restore us to freedom and home.

Thus encircled by our enemies, our only hope of escape lay in crossing the swamp in front of us, which was a most perilous undertaking, as all

who have any acquaintance with the swamps of the Chickahominy well know. The remembrance of the prison we had left, and the fear of one even worse if retaken, urged us on; and, after many difficulties, our efforts were at last successful. We attempted to cross four or five times before we were able to do so, and more than once we were ready to despair. In one of our attempts I stepped from a log and went down into mud waist-deep; every motion I made only served to carry me down still lower; but my true friend Fislar was at hand, and saved me from a horrible fate. He came to the end of the log, and I roused every energy and threw myself toward him; he was just able to reach my hand, which was eagerly stretched out to him, and he drew me exhausted from the mire.

Never can I forget that kind, generous friend—a truer man to country and friends does not live; the trials through which we passed only served to develop his noble nature, and he will ever seem dear as a brother to me. He is a noble specimen of a man, physically; has dark hair, brown eyes, and light complexion—is six feet high, well-proportioned, and has an agreeable face—is possessed of fine natural abilities, is twenty-three years of age, brave, active, and daring, ready for any emergency—and, to crown all, has as noble a heart as ever beat in human breast; and, for friend and companion, at home or abroad, in prosperity or adversity, there is no one that I have ever known that I would prefer to him.

Being exhausted by our journey through a swamp, which would have been deemed impassable had we not been urged on by hopes before and fears behind, we stopped for a time to gather strength for new efforts, hoping before sunrise to be beyond the reach of successful pursuit. Again we began our march, and near midnight we saw the picket-fires near Burnt Ordinary, but supposed them to be those of the rebels, as we had been told by the man who had betrayed us, that the rebels had a picket-guard at that place, which was true; but that evening, before we reached there, the Union cavalry had driven them away, and the fires we saw were those of our own pickets. Our narrow escape had rendered us very cautious; and having every reason to believe that the fires in sight were those of the enemy, we passed around them at what we thought a safe distance, and then struck out for Williamsburg, then, as we afterward learned, about twelve miles distant. We had not gone far before we were halted.

Inquiring of the sentinel who he was, and where we were, he informed us that he belonged to the Eleventh Pennsylvania Cavalry, which was under General Butler's command. As we had tried to play Confederate ourselves, we were not certain but that this might be one of them trying to play Yankee. After questioning him very closely, and being fully satisfied that he was "all right," we advanced. When we got up to him he told us that he and his comrades had been sent out on that advanced post in order to meet and aid prisoners who were said to have escaped from Libby Prison; and, added he, "I guess you are some of them." We told him we were, and he expressed great pleasure at meeting with us, and we felt what words never can express—a joy which can never be felt save by those who, after privations and anxieties like ours, feel that they are safe at last.

The next morning, having been furnished with horse, sword, and pistol, I moved forward with the column, which was composed of picked men from three companies of the Eleventh Pennsylvania Cavalry. My position was in front with the Captain—every man with eager eyes on the look-out for the late inmates of Libby. We had not advanced more than two miles before we saw two men emerge from a thicket and regard us anxiously; they were immediately recognized as escaped prisoners; but oh! What emotions filled my heart when I saw and knew the well-known forms and faces of Major Fitzsimmons and Captain Gallagher, of the old working party—companions in suffering, and soon to be partakers of joy such as mine! Spurring my horse in advance of the rest, and swinging my hat and cheering as I went, I hastened to meet my old companions—and seldom is so much joy pressed into a few brief moments as was ours when we met; we wept, we laughed, we shouted aloud in our joy, and warmer, gladder greetings will never be exchanged till we meet in the land where there are no partings. Our men came up and welcomed the fugitives warmly—not a man in the band who was not willing to dismount and let the wearied ones ride; and together we rode in search of others whom we doubted not were near; and during the day eleven more were added to our number—each one of them increasing our joy. I have known hours in my captivity when I have almost lost faith in man; but that day my faith in humanity was restored.

During the day we had several skirmishes with the rebel scouts, and captured a few horses and accouterments, and returned the same evening to Williamsburg, when another detachment was sent out on a mission similar to that in which we had been engaged; and I need not say they bore with them our warmest wishes for their success.

We were all furnished with transportation to Yorktown. From thence we went by boat to Fortress Monroe, and were conducted by General Wistar to headquarters, and introduced to General Butler, who expressed the greatest pleasure at our escape, and only regretted that some of our number had again fallen into the hands of the enemy. We had, of course, to go over the story of our treatment while in the hands of the rebels, and our perils on the way to the Union lines; and were made to feel the contrast by the attention bestowed upon us. Every heart seemed full of sympathy, and every tongue had a kind word. For ourselves, words were powerless to express the gratitude we felt for such constant kindness. Many had mourned us as dead, and our return was like the grave giving up those it had once claimed as its own; and we were unutterably glad to be under the old flag and at home once more.

Chapter Nine

Tom, Dick and Harry: The Great Escape from Stalag III

Robert Barr Smith and Laurence J. Yadon

Stalag Luft III was considered to be an especially important link in the vast chain of German prisoner-of-war camps, if only because of the great number of very important prisoners it held. As the Allied air offensive against Festung Europa gained in strength and intensity, an increasing number of Royal Air Force (RAF) and US Army/Air Force (USAAF) aircrew were forced to bail out or crash-land in German-held territory.

Highly trained aircrew were a precious commodity to the Allies. They took a long time to train—especially the pilots—and, accordingly, the British government put a high price on training them to avoid capture altogether or getting them out of enemy confinement and returned to duty. As early as December of 1939, Great Britain created MI9, an organization dedicated in large part to aiding the escape of airmen from the Germans.

In partnership with America's MIS-X, a clandestine organ with similar objectives, MI9's operatives worked as far away from home as China, parachuted into hostile places all over the world, and helped get out as many people as they could. All kinds of people owed their freedom to the men and women of MI9, but aircrew remained very high priority.

By and large, these airmen were a smart and enterprising lot and the most unwilling guests of the Germans; they promptly became a gross pain in the neck for their captors, commonly called "goons" by the prisoner population. A great many of the aircrew ended up at the camp called Stalag Luft III. It was a sprawling installation, close to the Polish border, some hundred miles south of Berlin and near the provincial town of Sagan.

The first couple of hundred POWs, British and American, arrived in the spring of 1942 and were confined in a section of Stalag Luft III called the North Compound. The compound was an area almost exactly a quarter-mile square, surrounded by the customary guard towers and two barbed-wire fences. The inside fence carried an electric charge, enough to alert the guards that somebody was fiddling with the fence. The second band of fence was more formidable still, no less than nine feet tall and strung with twenty strands of wire.

As if that were not security enough, there were also coils of barbed wire in the twenty feet or so between the fences, night guards who patrolled the fences, and more guards with unfriendly dogs inside the compound itself. It might have looked escape-proof to some peaceful civilians but not to the new residents.

Escape planning began almost immediately upon the prisoners' arrival, led by Squadron Leader Roger Bushell, RAF, head of the brand-new escape apparatus, the "X Committee." "Big X" as he was known, was older than most of his fellow prisoners but still a daring man and a born leader. One of the treasured parts of the prewar decor of his former squadron's mess was a road sign he had amputated while landing his aircraft for a drink at a rural pub.

He was surrounded by kindred spirits, mostly young men willing to try anything to escape and get back in the war, or just, as the British put it, to "cock a snook" at the Germans. One of these young firebrands was American-born Major Johnny Dodge, a globe-trotting adventurer who had joined the British forces—first navy, then army—and become a British subject in 1915.

He was twice wounded in World War I and won a chestful of decorations, starting with the Distinguished Service Cross. Spending the years between wars adventuring around the world, he ended up in the British Expeditionary Forces (BEF) in France in 1940 and was captured. He was first sent to another camp, where he was magically turned into an RAF officer by a stroke of the commandant's pen and moved to Stalag Luft III.

He was Bushell's kind of man.

So was Jimmy James, an RAF navigator who had walked some fifteen miles with a broken ankle through occupied Holland before Dutch

collaborators sold him out to the Germans. There were dozens more, all eager to escape, ready for any scheme that offered even a glimmer of a chance of success. Most of them were already veterans of at least one attempt to escape by the time they reached Stalag Luft III.

Bushell's madcap side didn't detract from his cool judgment; he would serve his fellow prisoners well. Bushell and the X Committee made a couple of intelligent decisions at the outset: First, use of the magic word "tunnel" was verboten for everybody; it was too easy to slip and say it where one of the Germans might hear.

Second, trying to go out over the wire and through the guards and the dogs was obviously a very bad idea; it was plainly not going to work. What chance there was would be to go under the fences, to dig and dig deeply, and that was best done at several points, without putting all their eggs in one basket. Accordingly, the committee decreed that there would be not one but three tunnels, and they would be called simply "Tom," "Dick," and "Harry." (In time, "George" was begun, but that's another tale.)

All prisoners would instantly recognize what was meant by the simple name; no German would have a clue. Take "Harry," for example: It was somebody's first name, that was all. And if one tunnel were found by the guard force, or even two of the three, with any luck at all there would still remain a chance for escape.

There were obvious problems. The barracks floors were deliberately built some two feet above the surface of the ground, to give the goons plenty of room to check for tunnel entrances. But you couldn't very well build latrines and showers two feet off the ground, and the Germans had also realized that there had to be some sort of hard foundation for the barracks stoves.

So, the brickwork foundations were the starting place. The diggers would use chunks of iron from old stoves, sections of tin can as shovels, and chisels improvised from table knives. And their hands.

For Dick, the starting place was a washroom drain. It was about eighteen inches square and set right in the middle of the floor. The tunnel, however, was started well inside the drain, a block of its concrete carefully chipped out of its side, big enough for a man to crawl through the wall of the drain into the soft earth around it and be about his digging.

A new concrete block to fill the hole was carefully cast from mix German workmen had left behind that had been liberated by prisoners along with all manner of other useful things sent by the X Committee. With the new block in place—the cracks painstakingly filled in with a mixture of soap and dust—and the grill on the washroom floor replaced, Dick was invisible. Similar magic produced Harry, hidden beneath a stove in another barracks block. Tom was started in what was called "a dark corner" of a washroom in still another block.

Which brought the Escape Committee to an even more difficult problem: what to do with the "spoil," the copious amounts of dirt the three tunnels would produce. You couldn't just dump it anyplace, for once the diggers got only slightly below the surface of the soil, the color of the spoil changed dramatically: No longer a nice quiet, unobtrusive dirt-colored dirt, it came up a bright yellow sand. You couldn't just pile the stuff up and hope nobody noticed; it stuck out like a sore thumb in any quantity.

A British pilot named Peter Fanshawe suggested the answer. We must scatter it, he said, scatter it in very small quantities, amounts so tiny they won't be noticed. It would take great care and much organization. It also took equipment, long pockets improvised from pajama bottoms, long underwear, and other trousers. These you carefully filled with spoil, which you then very carefully dribbled away in very small quantities, hanging the bag down your pant leg and walking about trying to look innocent while you pulled gently on a drawstring and bled the bag very slowly of its contents.

Some of the tell-tale yellow sand could be hidden in the little gardens the prisoners were allowed to cultivate. The "dirt-colored" dirt dug out of the gardens could be mixed in with the yellow stuff to dilute it and make it easier to spread. The earth-hiding operation took lots of earth-spreaders, but there was no shortage of men eager to help. They were called "Penguins."

To keep the amount of spoil to a minimum and speed up progress, the tunnels had to be as small as possible, so narrow that only a single man could work at the face at once. Behind him was another man to whom he shoved his gleanings. The second man loaded the dirt into a little wagon

with ropes attached to both ends; a tug on the rope signaled another prisoner, who hauled the cart back to the tunnel entry. As the tunnels got longer, there would be even more men engaged in moving dirt back to the tunnel entry.

And the longer the tunnels grew, the harder the work got. The tunnels were always hot, the air foul, in spite of improvised ventilation in the form of a sort of homemade bellows also produced by the prisoners. And the tunnels were dark, dark as the pits of hell, even with a primitive lighting system, a sort of candle-lamp fueled by fat skimmed from mess-hall soup and from margarine and food fat purloined from the kitchens. A piece of cord made a simple wick. In time, the tunnels would be lit with power bootlegged from the prison system, but until then the dim, stinking, primitive lamplight would have to do.

What to do about possible interference by the guards? Ordinary caution helped, of course, eternal caution in every word and even the simplest action. So did the alarm system inside the tunnels, tin cans filled with a handful of pebbles, actuated by a long string running along the ceiling of the tunnels. At the approach of a guard uncomfortably close to the tunnel entry, a little tug on the string brought strict silence. Other prisoners formed a surveillance system, keeping track of where the goons were and where they were probably going.

The diggers had to be endlessly vigilant about their everyday prison clothing as well. No trace of the tell-tale yellow sand could be allowed outside where guard personnel might see it, either piled on the ground or smeared on a digger's clothing. Accordingly, everybody in the tunnels worked either naked or in long johns.

Tunnel Tom was a good illustration of the system in action. The spoil came back down the tunnel and up to the washroom in cans. These were dumped on the floor on a blanket tended by American Tom Minskewitz, who filled the trouser-leg bags of the Penguins. They then went about their casual strolling, their gardening, or their group masquerades. The blanket kept the washroom floor clear of the deadly yellow sand while the distributors' bags were filled.

The dirt distribution systems were many and varied. American Jerry Sage, for example, had organized a sort of drill team—forty men or so—as

a means of exercise and passing the time. These men practiced their drills assiduously with ten or twelve earth-scatterers marching in the middle of their formation. Some of the spectators at prisoner volleyball games also left a little yellow sand behind them. The system worked.

For a while, at least. And then a prisoner got careless, a Penguin who unloaded too much of his bag of yellow sand in one place while standing alone a little distance away from the crowd at a volleyball match. Before anybody could pick it up or scatter it, it was spotted by a guard. The goons now knew that there was digging underway someplace.

An orgy of searching found nothing, however; the Germans even drove trucks up and down in the compound, obviously intending to cave in any tunnels; they could not know that Tom, Dick, and Harry were thirty feet below them. The goons even went so far as to hide a couple of their men in the ceiling of one prison block, presumably to eavesdrop on prisoners' guilty language. There were almost daily barracks searches.

Then came the Germans' maximum effort: an incursion by about a hundred soldiers, who industriously dug a four-foot-deep ditch across the compound and then began poking steel rods down its bottom, obviously probing for the roof of any tunnel. There was some excitement among the searchers when one probe hit something hard. Their prize turned out to be a rock, to the intense amusement of their prisoner audience.

The guards got nothing except acute embarrassment, but the need for increased caution was obvious to the diggers, and the work slowed dramatically. One solution was to stop work on Tunnel Dick and turn it into a dump for the treacherous sand. Abandoning Dick had another advantage: Now, a few pieces at a time, the diggers could also remove and reuse Dick's timbering, the mattress slats from the beds of a good many prisoners.

The slats, some four thousand of them, were only part of the colossal infusion of German property converted by the prisoners to serve the Allied war effort. Included were hundreds of pieces of eating utensils, over a thousand feet of rope, hundreds of blankets and towels, and some 1,400 tin cans.

Probably the most important loot were two large rolls of electrical wire. These had been left on the ground by a German electrician while

he perched on a ladder wiring something else and were casually picked up and boldly liberated by a passing member of the escape team. The two rolls became the heart of the tunnel lighting system; no longer were the diggers required to grope about in primordial gloom and the stench of smoldering grease.

The run of good luck was interrupted by a sad event: the transfer of the American prisoners to another camp not long before the projected time of the tunnels' completion. The Yanks, as the British called them, had contributed much to what would later become known as the Great Escape; now they could not share in it. If their transfer was a profound disappointment at the time, time would reveal it as a mixed blessing.

The work went on until Tom was making as much as ten feet a day; it was almost into the woods surrounding the compound, and then the blow fell; the Germans sent a work party out to cut down trees and brush until the shelter of the woods had been pushed back a hundred feet or so. Worse was to come.

A surprise search discovered the entrance to Tom. While a guard was painstakingly tapping one of the washroom floors, his little metal rod lodged in a minute crack. He pushed on with his careful inquiry, more guards pitched in, and the result was the discovery and destruction of Tom. A guard who crawled to the end and back is said have taken a half hour for the round-trip.

It was a blow, after all the sweat and the filth, the danger and the sacrifice, but Bushell cast it in the right light. "We're going ahead," he said, and added, "we still have two tunnels; the Germans probably think we don't have any." And so, although the Escape Committee suspended digging operations for a while, mostly because of bitter cold weather, they started again in earnest when the new year arrived.

Harry now advanced as many as ten or twelve feet a day, until it reached almost 350 feet. Since the distance to the forest was estimated at 335 feet, it was at last time to dig another direction . . . up. This time there would be no last-minute disappointment, for the initial upward dig hit what the prisoners had long hoped for: tree roots. And at last, in March, a metal rod pushed into the roof of the upward leg of the tunnel broke through with only six inches to go to the surface.

Freedom was just half a foot away.

Last-minute planning also called for two things: the best weather possible at this time of year and, if possible, a moonless night. The Escape Committee settled on March 24.

While the digging had been going on, the forgers had been busy with all kinds of false documents, identity cards, and passes and paybooks and such, of which there seemed to be an endless variety. Nobody traveled in Nazi Europe without at least one such *ausweis*, generally more. Nobody could. Whatever disguise each escaper chose, his paper had to match; it had to have a convincing picture and the appropriate date stamp, and it had to appear wrinkled and a little faded with use.

Some of the forgers' raw materials came from goons hungry for decent cigarettes and other treasures from Red Cross parcels. Trading was done on the barter system, of which the unit of measurement was the cigarette. Some required documents were improvised on the spot; for instance, quite useful official-looking stamps—without which no German document was complete—were created from boot soles. The necessary ID photographs were taken with a German officer's borrowed Leica, ostensibly for mailing home.

RAF flight lieutenant Tim Walenn had been a graphic artist as a civilian; he became forger-in-chief, responsible for producing the enormous quantity of paper: The men due to escape had chosen their identities and the costumes that matched them. They had necessarily also chosen their nationality. All the documents Walenn and his forgery crew produced had to match an escaper . . . and be both convincing and current.

Some prisoners spoke fluent French or German; some were native speakers of other tongues, like Polish and Dutch. Some British officers could manage no language save their own, at least not convincingly. These men chose identities that required a speech few Germans were likely to understand. Bulgarian was popular; one prisoner put it pretty well: "Nobody speaks Bulgarian except the Bulgarians, and they're 600 miles away"—which had a certain logic to it, although the Escape Committee turned that man down. At least two others did go out as Bulgarians, "forestry students"; that guise would at least give them a chance of accounting for themselves if the Germans caught them skulking about in the woods.

These men were part of the contingent called "hard-assers," men planning to make their escape cross-country, hiding where they could, living rough, traveling fast in what promised to be vile weather. At least the hard-assers didn't have to worry as much about inquisitive waiters and desk clerks, busybody train conductors, and nosy policemen.

The underground tailor shop also had much painstaking work to do before the break. Staffed mostly by Czech and Polish officers, the tailors turned out everything from business suits to German military uniforms to foreign workers' dungarees. Their work took immense care; you might get away with converting a military tunic to a civilian coat if you were very, very careful, but you had to pay the closest attention to every detail, even little things like buttons and stripes.

Compasses for the hard-assers were created by painstakingly magnetizing prisoners' razor blades, then breaking them into tiny slivers. Compass cases came from melted plastic phonograph records, and luminous compass points were created from the hands of the commandant's own alarm clock, purloined from his office. The genius who made these useful things was an Australian named Hake, whose finishing touch was stamping each of his compasses "Made in Stalag Luft III. Patent Pending." By the spring of 1944, he had turned out more than five hundred compasses.

Nobody would go out armed. Even had they been able to obtain weaponry, it would have done them little good in the middle of Fortress Europe. It would simply have gotten them killed, shot down during arrest, or murdered by the Gestapo later. Wits and careful preparation were the prisoners' weapons; they carried nothing more deadly than their prisoner dog tags, essential to any kind of decent treatment if they were recaptured.

Some elected to travel alone. Others went out in pairs or even slightly larger groups. There was some comfort in not being alone, and two or more prisoners could help each other. But large groups of prisoners were almost sure to attract more unwelcome attention than a man alone or a companionable pair.

Then came the hard part: How many prisoners could try the break, and how would they be selected? The committee made the tough calls, since the best estimates were that a total of no more than 200 to 220

POWs could make it through the tunnel in a single night, and more than 500 men wanted to go.

The first thirty were chosen as having the best chance for escape, because of some special quality, such as fluency in French or other languages. They would all travel by train, and the early start would help guarantee them time to get to the local railroad station in time to have their pick of trains.

Bushell and his committee would then hold a drawing for the remaining spaces, and these men would go out in the order in which their names had been drawn. The next twenty spaces were chosen from those who had worked hardest in the tunnel; ten more from the biggest contributors among the forgers and tailors and gadget-makers and Penguins. The rest of the 200 or so were chosen in a blind draw from everybody else who wanted to go. There was much disappointment.

At zero hour, the first seventeen men were poised at the head of the tunnel, waiting for it to be opened into the darkness and cool of the woods . . . and freedom. It was only then that they made the saddest discovery of all their days in the prison camps. The diggers' calculations had been in error . . . the shelter of the woods was still some ten feet away. And about forty short feet away to one side of the tunnel exit, in plain view, there was a sentry post, and it was manned.

Bushell had an enormous command decision to make, and just minutes to make it.

We go, he said; we can't wait another month. The risk in waiting for another favorable moon was too great. Every day of delay heightened the chance of a guard or an informant learning something, of a prisoner slipping. And now they had the exit hole to worry about.

And so the file of POWs traveled one by one down the long tunnel on the little trolley that had served to evacuate all that spoil, carefully holding their baggage out in front of them—the size and weight of what each man would carry had already been passed on by the Escape Committee.

At one point the electric lighting shut down for a half hour or so, courtesy of the Royal Air Force; some eight hundred British bombers were on their way to Berlin. The German capital was a hundred or so

miles away, but the Germans regularly turned off the power of any city or town that might furnish a landmark to guide Allied aircraft to Berlin. If the shutdown pitched the tunnel into stygian gloom, it also extinguished the camp's exterior lighting, including the searchlights along the perimeter fence. That at least was some help to the escapers who had already reached the tunnel exit.

The exit itself was the first obstacle. The tunnel hatch was frozen shut in this miserably cold weather, and it took more than an hour in the gloom of the exit tunnel to break it loose.

Some of the baggage also caused problems, falling off or momentarily jamming the progress of the little trolley. It was much worse for RAF officer Tom Kirby-Green: His suitcase hung up on some of the tunnel's timbering and he was buried in a cave-in deep in the pitch-black tunnel. Frantic digging by the other prisoners got him out, shaken and unhurt, but the process took the better part of an hour. More delay.

At the exit, each man climbed up through the exit hole and crawled carefully past the sentry post. Once out and into the dubious safety of the woods, each man stood and cautiously walked away, and for a while the system worked perfectly.

The eightieth man in line (some sources differ as to this number) was a prisoner called Bob McBride. He was climbing up to the surface for his chance at liberty, when he heard a shot and the howl of a whistle, and when he hastily reached the surface, he found himself looking down the barrel of a Mauser rifle.

And so, after all the toil and worry, the sweat and the planning and the careful precautions, the rest of the escapers would not get to breathe free air after all. It was a bitter pill. Those who hadn't made it out hastily burned their false papers—"dozens of little bonfires" as one source put it—while others feasted hastily on their carefully hoarded bits of traveling food.

In the end, after a series of wild adventures, only three men finally reached safety, just three of the dozens who started out. Two were Norwegian officers, the third a Dutchman; all of them were intimately familiar with Europe, fluent in other languages. None of hard-assers made it; the bitter weather and deep snow made off-road travel impossible.

On the plus side, however, those who made it out and survived tasted a priceless bit of freedom and gave fits to the German jailers and hunters. One RAF man, Jimmy James, put it pretty well:

> *I climbed up the ladder and the first thing I saw were stars. I thought of the RAF motto—per Ardua ad Astra (through adversity to the stars). . . . I lost some good friends in that escape . . . some of the finest men I've ever known.*

Jimmie would survive the war, in spite of being part of no fewer than a dozen escape attempts.

Seventeen of the recaptured escapers were returned to Stalag Luft III. Four more were sent to the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen, near Frankfurt. All four dug their way out and won a few weeks more of freedom, only to be recaptured and returned to Sachsenhausen camp. Two more ended up in the maximum security of Colditz Castle.

Sadly, inexcusably, foully, some fifty were executed after capture, killings that were premeditated murder in the simplest sense. Hitler had initially decreed that all recaptured officers were to be executed, and only reduced the number slightly after pleas from several high-ranking officers—among them Goering and Field-Marshal Keitel—that such killings plainly violated the Geneva Conventions.

Since early 1944, the protection of the Geneva Conventions had been increasingly ignored by the German authority, in particular the Gestapo. Muller, the Gestapo chief, ordered (in secret, of course) that all recaptured escapers, except British and Americans, were to be taken to Mauthausen concentration camp and shot out of hand. This order was appropriately called Aktion Kugel, the "Bullet Decree."

Among the dead was Big X, Roger Bushell. Bushell was shot along with a fellow officer near Saarbrueken, Germany, by a pair of Gestapo men. Bushell and his companion had made some eight hundred miles in about ten hours by fast train. When their luck ran out, the two officers were only two hours from France, where they stood a good chance of getting help from the Resistance.

The man who killed Big X, Emil Schulz, survived the war. He did not, however, survive British justice. The second Gestapo murderer was killed before the fighting ended.

Jimmie James made it through the war, along with thousands of other inmates of Sachsenhausen. The commandant got a Himmler Befehl (directive, order) on the first of February 1945, directing the extermination of the entire prisoner population, but the British contingent survived courtesy of a friendly police inspector. The prisoners ended up in a comparative paradise, a town in the peaceful Dolomite Alps.

For most of the escapers, at least, the whole exercise had been well worth it, in spite of the hardship and danger and disappointment, in spite of the grief the murder of their comrades caused them. Spitfire pilot Sidney Dowse, already a veteran escaper before he left Harry behind him, put it this way: "We caused havoc to the Germans and tied up thousands if not millions of them in the search for us."

Another Spitfire pilot, New Zealander Mike Shand, said much the same thing:

> *It was worth it. I don't think any of us thought we'd make it back to England . . . but we had to do something. We did it to cause chaos behind enemy lines and that's exactly what we did.*

The end of captivity for Johnny Dodge was not only miraculous but bizarre. Pulled out of confinement by an SS officer, he was whisked off to Berlin, dressed in civilian clothes, housed in the ritzy Adlon Hotel, and wined and dined. The reason soon became clear. He was to carry a peace proposal to England and present it to his "kinsman," none other than Winston Churchill (they were not, in fact, related). The German offer itself served to demonstrate the surreal, phantom world that was Berlin at the end of the war: Hitler would settle for nothing less than a British guarantee that Germany's prewar boundaries would be maintained.

At the end of Dodge's long trip home, he did get to see Churchill, who entertained him at 10 Downing Street. Two days later, Germany surrendered unconditionally.

It seems appropriate to close with something St. Matthew wrote a very long time ago. It is a short writing only, and already appears in a couple of excellent books on the "great escape." That does not lessen its power a bit, and I shamelessly quote it again here, for what St. Matthew said fits precisely the spirit that moved and sustained the men of Stalag Luft III, the men who would not give up: "And fear not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul." No matter how tough things got, no matter how dangerous, the souls of the men of Stalag Luft III never wavered.

Sources

"London to Ladysmith via Pretoria," from *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria*. Winston Spencer Churchill. London, United Kingdom: Longmans Green. 1900.

"They Have Their Exits: Escape from Colditz Castle," from *They Have Their Exits*. Airey Neave. Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Books Ltd. 1953.

"Hero Found: Dieter Dengler's Escape from Laos," from *Hero Found: The Greatest POW Escape of the Vietnam War.* Bruce Henderson. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers. 2010.

"Prisoner of the U-90," from *Prisoner of the U-90.* Edouard Isaacs. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1919.

"The Great Desert Escape from Papago Park," from *The Great Desert Escape: How the Flight of 25 German Prisoners of War Sparked One of the Largest Manhunts in American History.* Keith Warren Lloyd. Lanham, MD: Lyons Press, a division of the Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group New York. 2019.

"The Long Walk," from *The Long Walk: The True Story of a Trek to Freedom.* Slavomir Rawicz. Lanham, MD: Lyons Press, a division of the Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group Inc., New York. 2016.

"The Libby Prison Break of the American Civil War," from *Four Months in Libby and the Campaign Against Atlanta.* I.N. Johnston. Cincinnati, OH: E.P. Thompson. 1864.

"Twelve Iron Men: Escape from the Philippines," and "Tom, Dick and Harry: The Great Escape from Stalag III," from *The Greatest Escapes of World War II*. Robert Barr Smith and Laurence J. Yadon. Lanham, MD: Lyons Press, a division of the Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group New York. 2017.